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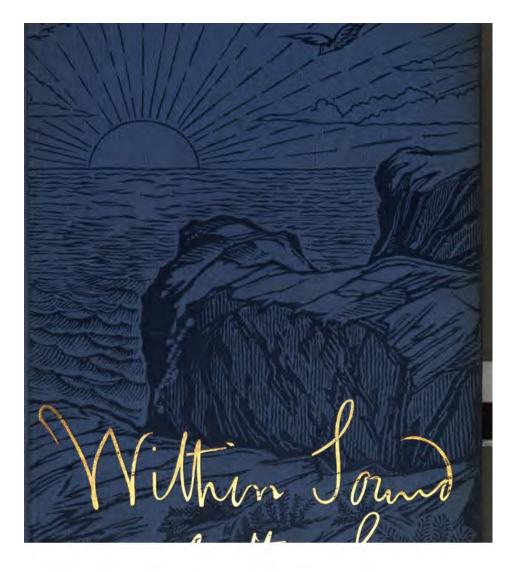
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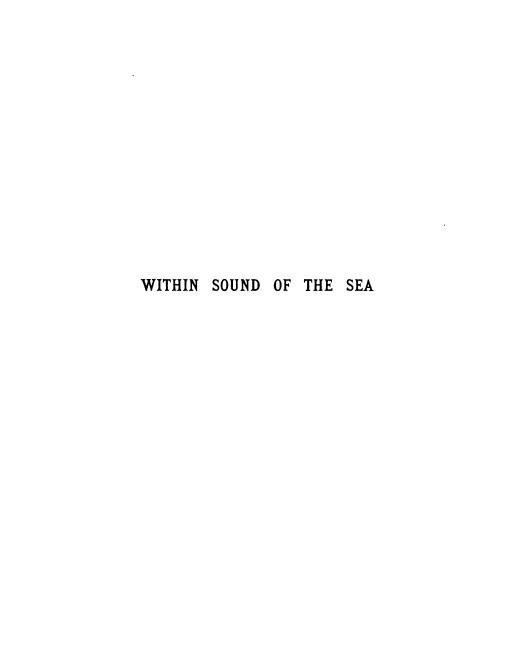




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IN TWO VOLUMES

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

TURNBULL v. FAIRLIE.

'The future is never so strange as we picture it to ourselves. A hundred golden threads bind it to us already. It is all one's whole past which claims the future, and draws it into itself. One thing recalls another, as one thing foretold another.'—MISS THACKERAY.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CHILI. October had come round again, and Dr. Fairlie had been nearly four months a stranger to Lumgair.

London was half-empty, but the Long Vacation was drawing to its close, and in another ten days' time business-men and their families would have settled in town for the winter; for its work, and its bread-winning.

One of the first cases for hearing in the Court of Common Pleas is that of Turnbull v. Fairlie. Counsel had been engaged on the one side and on the other, and Mr. John Fairlie now awaited in London the commencement of a suit on which, not only his fortune, but his reputation was staked.

Most serious charges had been brought against him by his sister and her husband, and the suspense was telling on his strength in a way to cause serious anxiety to his son. It was true that the old man occasionally seemed able to make a good fight of it, but at others he drooped so much that, while he affected to speak hopefully of the results of the trial, his looks belied the confidence he expressed. He was obliged to admit that his strength was failing, or rather that it was not, as it had been, equal to any strain. 'In fact,' he said, 'it is in trying to jump the ditch that a man finds out that he is old.'

Then his son would again urge him to compromise the affair. 'Why not offer to go shares with Mrs. Turnbull?'

'No,' retorted his father sullenly, 'it is all in the lawyers' hands now, and there it must be left. To take it out of their hands, and to bid them make such an offer at the last hour, would be tantamount to admitting that we have a bad case.'

Robert Fairlie listened, but he was not convinced. Could not Mrs. Turnbull be worked upon and made to wish on her side that the quarrel should be adjusted by mutual compromises? It might gratify momentary vengeance to ruin an only brother, but, that once done, what would remain to her? Only the blackened reputation of her family (of which two members

would have been proved to have been scamps) and as much of William Fairlie's fortune as the lawyers might please to leave after they had had their pickings. She would surely do better to come to terms with her brother, if only on the principle that it is a silly fowl that soils its own nest, and that half a loaf is better than no bread.

Mr. Fairlie replied that there was no chance of that now, and then relapsed into angry calculations of the costs that would certainly leave his enemies little, if any, bread. He placed all his faith in the fact that letters of administration had been granted him by his late brother at a period previous to a demise which might have been sudden at the last, but which no one, he urged, who knew the habits of the late Mr. W. W. Fairlie, could justly call unexpected.

These letters of administration were to be made the most of by counsel, and they would serve to explain the drawing of those two large cheques which the Turnbulls chose to speak of as forgeries, because they were dated prior to the death of the testator.

The animus of Mr. Turnbull had throughout been so extremely bitter that Mr. Fairlie and his sister

had thought it best never to meet since his return from Toronto, and since the beginning of their dispute about the Canadian succession.

At the present moment the Turnbulls were spending the summer at Norwood. So much Robert Fairlie was able to gather about them, and there, indeed, he found them when, acting one day on a sudden impulse, he walked up to the door of a house in Palace Road. He rang, and had himself shown in quite unexpectedly upon his aunt and cousin.

His visit lasted about half an hour. Mrs. Turnbull began by making him a stiff bow, but she relented after the first five minutes, which were spent by her daughter, Magdalen, in alternate exclamations of wonder at the change in her cousin, and at his sudden appearance in Norwood. 'I could not be in town and not look you up,' he said, looking hard at her. 'I am sure we never expected to see you again: certainly not now,' she cried.

The six years that had elapsed since the Turnbulls left Lanark had greatly changed this young lady herself. Miss Magdalen Turnbull was now nearly twenty years of age. She had a thickset figure, pretty but rather insignificant features, light hair, a quantity of freckles, and a set of the whitest teeth in the world.

Robert Fairlie, on his side, had developed into a tall, strong, stately man, with a long auburn beard, long, tapering hands, and a look of great power as well as gravity in his face. In fact, the cousins were obliged to confess that they might easily have passed each other in the street without so much as guessing that they had spent all their childhood together. Yet Robert Fairlie had now to make the best use of those childish days in Lanark. He referred to them again and again, so that Magdalen sat smiling and colouring; and finally Mrs. Turnbull, seeing her darling child so gratified, was fain to relent, and to remember the past also.

When Dr. Fairlie quitted the house he stood for a moment on the doorstep, looked up to the bowwindow of the room in which Magdalen remained standing, lifted his hat to her, and smiled; while the young lady smiled, and also lingered in a way that encouraged him to repeat his visit to Palace Road.

One visit led to another, and Robert Fairlie never

for a moment lost sight of his original idea in the matter of this hideous lawsuit, viz., that it must be possible to compromise it in some way, and not, among such near relations, pursue it to its bitter end. That the result would be disastrous to all concerned he had felt keenly from the first, and he said so to his aunt when, on the occasion of his second visit, the Turnbulls took him to see the Crystal Palace.

As they sat together on a bench in the nave they were supposed to be admiring some of those repulsive groups of savages that are set up to exhibit their peculiarities and their boomerangs among the evergreens, but Dr. Fairlie was in reality observing his cousin, and he continued to watch her, until he felt sure that, in her partiality for himself, he had secured an important ally.

He recommenced his appeals to the past, furbished up recollections of the old home in Lanark, of all the pets, and pastimes, and hair-breadth escapes of their childhood, and then passed on to the joint reverse of fortune to which his father and Mr. Turnbull had been exposed by the failure of the Western Bank. He

hinted that his father was not unmindful of these facts, or of old ties. So far from this, he knew that his father had been from the first disposed to make his only sister a gainer from the Canadian fortune. That had been his first thought, but of course, under the present painful and embittered state of family matters, that idea had long been abandoned. His father now only dwelt on the injuries he had received from his sole surviving relation, who had not even stopped at the more lenient charge of perjury, but had proceeded, through robbery and forgery, to hint at poison. Certainly, the inference was not unfair that a man who could commit these crimes might not have been incapable of contributing to the premature death of a brother. They must, Robert said in conclusion, be admitted to be a most unfortunate family.

Mrs. Turnbull, who had got very red, said nothing during this exordium but 'H'm-h'm' at intervals; but Magdalen, on the contrary, got pale, the more so as her eyes and those of her cousin happened to meet, and to rest on each other for a moment.

'I declare to you, Robert, I am perfectly certain, that I am nowise to blame,' exclaimed the old lady at last in rather a husky voice. 'I can most honestly say that I dislike quarrels; and, though I may be rather quick in my temper, I have kept the peace to the best of my ability, and always respected my own family. But I cannot see my daughter wronged by an unjust will—mind, I don't say that it is a forged one, Robert!'

'Oh, mamma! never mind now about that weary will,' cried the young lady, between crying and laughing.

'But I must mind about it, girl!'

'But what, my dear aunt, what, allow me to ask you, becomes, after such a suit as this, of the honour of your own family and of its good name? Nothing to its discredit is known as yet, but once let this case be reported in the "Times," and you may then as well try to stop the sun in its course as to stop the tongues of all Lanark, and of the London lawyers. I say nothing about the many strange tales of my Uncle William's career in the States that must come out; but what, for example, do you wish to have said about his marriage with a ticket-of-leave woman in Melbourne? Though Mrs, William Walker Fairlie

happens, luckily for us all, to be both dead and buried, still a convict she was to all intents and purposes; and at one time, if she wanted to travel, she could only do so under the supervision of the police. You can hardly wish to claim her as a near relation for yourself and your child.'

'Oh! I declare that I never, never, could show my face again if all that was to come out and be said about us,' cried Magdalen, almost with tears.

Mrs. Turnbull tugged at her bonnet-strings, while Robert Fairlie went on: 'Of course all those things, and many more, will have to come out—the episode of the magic lantern, and the whole life in the States, which is really not fit for public inspection. Then grant, for a moment, that Mr. Turnbull wins his suit. It is a monstrous supposition for me to make, but still for argument's sake we will make it. Well, admit it, I say, and what is the result?—you have proved your only remaining brother guilty of felony. What next? To Mr. Turnbull's feelings I naturally can have no clue, but your own, my dear aunt, as regards your own family, and the future prospects of your daughter, are certainly not to be envied. I do

not speak of myself—I should in such a case be simply ruined and done for, and should leave the country.'

Magdalen, who had been gazing at the speaker through all his arguments with eyes of admiring pity, now looked so uncommonly piteous that Dr. Fairlie instinctively felt that he might do worse than leave his case in her hands. He accordingly took his leave, but not until it had been arranged that he should come down again on Sunday, and then meet his uncle, Mr. Turnbull, before the family should have left its holiday quarters at Norwood.

CHAPTER XXIX.

HONOUR v. DISHONOUR.

'Whose honour in dishonour rooted stood.'

TENNYSON.

CHAPTER XXIX.

IT was the last Sunday in October. The morning had been frosty, and the elm-trees were shedding their shrivelled leaves upon the broad gravel paths. In fact, the year was dying, through still brief days and sweet. The horizon was blue and misty, but from the brow of Sydenham Hill the rich English landscape stretched away for miles, with a middle distance full of sunshine and golden stubbles; while from the gardens, with their piles of dahlias, came the robin's autumnal note.

It was afternoon, and two figures might be seen walking up the steep incline of Palace Road. At a respectful distance from them, two young girls loitered arm-in-arm, and as they went they said to each other in laughing tones, 'Are they not a regular Sunday couple?'

All the passers-by, unless it were some preoccu-

pied 'Sunday couples,' turned to look at Dr. Robert Fairlie as he walked with his cousin Magdalen Turnbull. His great height, with his peculiar colouring, would have made him remarkable at any time, but to-day his head was a little bent, his eyes had an odd, suppressed excitement, and he gnawed his nether lip. Magdalen stepped demurely by his side. She had been to meet her cousin at the station—he had asked her to do so—and now, when he had thanked her for coming, she was very pale, very silent, and very happy.

This is only the fourth time that they have been together since she shed those girlish tears on leaving Lanark, and her big, teasing, and yet protecting, Cousin Robert. But Magdalen already loves him. He, on his side, though he may have to marry her, is not in love with her. How could he be—with the wrong woman, with the wrong voice, and with the wrong soul, looking through the wrong eyes? But to this tender-hearted companion he may yet owe peace and safety, and the possible compromise of the suit which must otherwise bring loss and pain, and perhaps ruin and shame, into his father's house.

As the young people approached the house Mr. Turnbull's figure became visible in the bow window. Magdalen preferred to separate from her cousin in the little garden. 'Oh! I cannot go in,' she said: 'I am always afraid to speak before papa. Besides, you are going to talk business with him, so you cannot want me. You will be better alone. I will walk on, with the two Constable girls, to Anerley.'

The conversation between Dr. Fairlie and his uncle was *tête-à-tête*, and it was a singularly unpleasant one for the young man, since now, for the first time, he heard a good deal of the plaintiff's side of the question.

Decidedly the elder Fairlie must have acted throughout with the greatest want of caution, and it had not been till after the suit was instituted against him that a copy could be got from him of the deed of administration, and of those other documents on which he now took his stand. His excuse, that he had hardly ever been stationary in any place, was, Mr. Turnbull urged, a mere subterfuge, and what his motive might have been for such conduct Robert Fairlie himself could not even guess. Neither could

he explain why his father should have offered, as it seemed he had done, to sell his interest as administrator to a Scotchman in Toronto of the name of William Harkiss.

These facts, whether correct or exaggerated, were certainly ugly ones, as narrated by an ill-wisher; and the gravest part of it was that, whether true or false, they were all absolutely new to the defendant's son. Robert Fairlie shuddered as he thought how anyone of them might be turned to account by a quick-witted and unscrupulous pleader, and he hugged even closer to himself the determination he had already formed at the close of his second visit to Norwood.

Dinner was served to the Turnbull family at six o'clock. Robert Fairlie dined with them, and before the meal was over, Jane, the cook, and Alice, the little workhouse girl, who ran errands, peeled potatoes, and played with the inevitable lodging-house cat, had settled in their own minds, while handing the horse-radish sauce for the Sunday roast beef, that 'Miss fancied her cousin,' and would probably 'get married to him' before Christmas.

The hour of leave-taking came at last, and the visitor walked away to the station—but with how heavy a heart! Never, since that first night of consternation in which the tidings of his father's difficulties had reached him at Lumgair, had he suffered as he suffered to-night.

'Guilty or not guilty?' Again those dreadful words rang in his ears, and, do what he would, he could not banish them. Be his father guilty or innocent of the graver charges brought against him, it was but too evident that there were dark pages in his Canadian past, as well as in that of Mr. William Fairlie, and who knows what detestable discoveries yet to be made by looking into matters more closely? The son felt that he for one had not the courage to do so, and he was glad, when he returned to their hotel, to go to bed without even seeing his father.

All night he thought of the Turnbulls: of the little ferret-eyed father, the red-faced, loud-tongued mother, and of Magdalen, walking with her flat feet, and talking with that strong twang, while she looked the picture of a self-conscious, commonplace flirtation. Marion's voice was melody itself, and, with its faint

Highland accent, came from the most lovely, curved lips that a man ever kissed.

There was, however, but one course open to him. He saw it, he knew it, and he felt it with that deadly perspicacity with which people sometimes perceive the fate that is prepared for them.

He had seen it for the last fortnight, but had hated himself, as if the clear vision was so far an acquiescence in a resolution at once so self-sacrificing and so base. Most of all he dreaded the automaton-like steps which he had made, and had yet to make, towards an arrangement that was so repulsive.

Magdalen Turnbull was an only child, and her wish, which was law to her mother, was nearly sure to be so to Mr. Turnbull. Magdalen liked him. She was twenty, and as uninteresting a girl as this populous globe contains; but she liked him, and she would help him to stop this lawsuit. It must be stopped. The affair must be compromised, and Mr. William Fairlie's fortune divided in a proportion that his father could offer, and that the Turnbulls could accept with propriety. There was only one way of doing it. He must marry Magdalen—make her his wife

—drag her about the world after him, and leave Marion Ford as if she had never—as would to God she had never—been. Leah was to be his, and Rachel was for ever lost.

Up till now he had, though he contemplated this step, been finessing with himself, and with misfortune. In visiting at Norwood he had been putting, as it were, an interval between his lost happiness at Marion's side, and the unsoundable gulf of trouble that, by no fault of his own, had opened before him. Into it he must leap. No more hopes, no more self-deception, and no reprieves were now possible.

Dr. Fairlie sprang out of bed, and opened the shutters. It was early, and the gas-lamps still burned, as yellow stars in the grey morning light. He took out of a pocket-book two photographs, a bit of narrow, dark-blue ribbon, and a sheet of note-paper, on which was a verse of a song.

These were all the relics that he possessed of Marion Ford. He kissed them, knelt down, and, after striking a match, burnt them on the hearth; and then, after drawing down both the blinds, he sat for two hours alone in the chill, dark, solitary room.

When he left it he looked as if he had come from a new-filled grave; and so he had, for the man who forsakes his first love has seen the ruin of the sanctuary of his life.

CHAPTER XXX.

A FEAST OF LANTERNS.

. . 'Each day brings its petty dust Our soon-choked souls to fill, And we forget because we must, And not because we will.'

M. ARNOLD.

CHAPTER XXX.

DR. FAIRLIE went down to Norwood by an afternoon train. He found Magdalen at home. She was working in the bow-window, and on his entrance she did not rise, but only looked up; and on his holding out his hand she gave him her own in a silence that she was too breathless to break.

Instead, however, of sitting down near her, he walked up and down the little sitting-room, and but very few words passed between the cousins.

The determination of Robert Fairlie had all along impressed itself on the girl's nerves, and had thus created an odd impression of helplessness. Even if she had not loved her cousin she could not have resisted him, or her fate, and to-day they both knew, with absolute certainty, how this interview would end. Only by one of them that end was feared, as men may fear the bolt which will launch them into

eternity; while the other, with wet eyes, roundopened, and with lips half-parted, sat in a glow of wonder and bliss, hearing, as it were, those chiming bells which ring out the old, and, for a woman, ring in the great, the wonderful, and the new.

Robert Fairlie at last said suddenly, 'Could we not go out for a walk? It is stifling in here.' And he suddenly flung himself down on a chair.

Magdalen ran off to fetch her hat. Alas! in what war-paint and feathers did she not now think it fit and right to appear! And her cousin, disenchanted as he was with everything that was not Marion, wondered how she had the courage to wear such garments, or such a hat.

However, they were to go for a walk, and out they went—first down the steep hill in silence, and then through the rosary at the gate of the Palace gardens, till they found themselves pacing its long terrace, within distant sound of a concert which was going on in the nave. Very few sentences had as yet been exchanged, for Magdalen was frightened as well as happy, and Robert was intensely preoccupied. He

had said nothing to his father about his present intentions, and nothing ever about Lumgair, or the girl who had there taken his heart into her gentle keeping. The best part of generosity is never to reveal what your sacrifice costs, and must go on to cost, you. Therefore in all his communications with the elder Fairlie his son had never questioned him, but only, as it were, set open for him doors by which he might, if he chose, make his escape.

Magdalen, however, would sometimes cross-question her cousin about his life at Lumgair. She began to do so this evening, but could elicit nothing from him except that the parish doctor's practice had been old-fashioned, and that he had been an obscurantist who still bled patients for congestion of the lungs. 'Of course they died--you are not surprised at it.' Magdalen, who knew nothing about it, was quite ready to be surprised or not, according to directions; but her questions bored her cousin so much that he suggested that they should go in, and listen to the music. 'Ah!' cried Magdalen, 'what a pity it is so late in the year! Early in this month they still illuminated all the fountains on Thursdays. You should have

been with us then. But there is to be a feast of lanterns in the Palace after dusk. It will be delightful.'

They had just entered the concert-room and taken their places, when two of the seats in front of them were occupied by a couple of people whom Magdalen declared to be engaged lovers, and who were certainly about her own age. She drew her cousin's attention to them—in the hope, I think, that it would provoke him into a tender speech, if not into an absolute declaration; but Robert Fairlie turned as pale as if he had seen a ghost, and before the first movement of the symphony had ended, was sitting with his arms folded on the back of an empty chair in front of him. His breath came very fast; and finally, to Magdalen's surprise, she saw, when he raised his face from his arms, that it was wet with tears.

- 'Do you care for music so much?' she asked.
- 'Yes—no, I mean; yes,' was the reply, and then they spoke no more while the symphony went on. Storms of sound filled the room; a bright, happy motif was worked out now in one key, now in another; and then came an adagio, in which the very soul of Love breathed through regrets, and vanished in a sigh.

It wearied Magdalen. But what, she asked herself, made Robert tremble so? and why did he gaze at the woman in front of them, and start if ever she happened to turn in their direction a little, pale face in which Magdalen, at any rate, could see nothing remarkable except a pair of large brown eyes?

'Never,' muttered Robert to himself—' never did I see such a wonderful likeness.' And he fairly gnashed his teeth, for the woman's hand was now ungloved—he saw a wedding-ring on her finger. So the young man who sat beside her, 'blest as the immortal gods,' was the husband of this little soft-eyed creature, who might really have been Marion Ford's twin sister. Young, innocent, happy, though evidently not rich, and newly married to a man who was proud of her, how sweet she looked! But, oh! where, and how, was Marion?

Robert Fairlie again bowed his head on his arms. It felt as if it must burst, while the orchestra tripped through the trio, and the minuet, of that cruel symphony.

Where, and how, was Marion? Did she not claim him by that one kiss, remembered so wildly to-night, when the zeal of his lost love wellnigh ate

him up, and while his cousin sat there, expecting to become his wife? He would have no wife but Marion. She had had the bloom of his fancy and of his first love, and no other woman should have the strength of his matured passion. Only now, by dint of suffering, had he learnt what loving deeply meant. Can anything in the world, credit, honour, or fortune, repay what the heart loses? And had not Marion a right to him? Might he not write to her, and tell her of his cruel trial, and of his constant love? Ah! but what could he say to Magdalen? 'I will bid her forget a man who never cared for her. Father, I cannot interfere further! Marion, I come! I come!'

With a loud crash the finale (presto, molto agitato) had come to an end. The woman in front of them rose, her husband put a shawl over her shoulders, she looked her thanks, turned, and was gone.

- 'Did you ever see that lady before, Robert? You did nothing but watch her. Do you know her?' asked Magdalen as they also left the concert-room.
 - 'I don't know her from Eve.'
- 'They are newly married, I am sure. Do you think her pretty?'

'No—plain,' was the reply; and then the cousins emerged into the nave, which had been sombre when they had exchanged it for the concert-room, but which was now all lit with Chinese lanterns, and filled with a crowd of people.

It is the last *fête* of the season,' said Magdalen. 'How I wish we had all settled to dine here!'

- 'We can do so, if you like.'
- 'Would it not be delicious?'

So dinner was ordered, and Robert Fairlie's fate was sealed. His determination to sacrifice himself had become, as we see, very feeble, but the circumstances he had created for himself when it was stronger, now carried the day. A small body of water can receive, from the slope of the hill, down which it falls, a momentum and a force out of all proportion to its own volume, and so to-night Dr. Fairlie's will was carried along. As they walked home he proposed to Magdalen, and was accepted.

It was dark; not a breeze stirred the trees, and not a doubt crossed the girl's mind as to the good faith of the offer that her cousin made her. Youth not only wears a wreath of roses, but believes that it does so of right. Nor had Magdalen's heart lost, through the hard lessons of experience, any of the first freshness of its trusting nature. So, between laughing and crying, she told Robert that she had never forgotten him, and had never loved anyone else. Fortunately he was not bound to be equally frank with her, or he must have told her that he had forgotten her, and that not only had he loved some one else, but that he worshipped her still—even Marion, his first love.

Ah! if he could have beheld her, weeping, only yest'reen, through the long night-hours in that tall, white house within sound of the sea! How embittered then would have been this betrothed state of his, with all the congratulations and preparations into which his bride was ready to plunge herself and him!

Mr. John Fairlie sent his daughter-in-law elect a present of a gold watch and chain, and then went off to Scotland, on such urgent private affairs that he had no time to pay her his respects in person.

The suit of Turnbull v. Fairlie never came up for hearing before the Court of Common Pleas, and

Robert Fairlie bought a practice near Mitcham, and put a red lamp over his surgery-door.

Before Christmas he was married, and some of her wedding-cake was duly sent by Magdalen to the old lodging at Norwood, when Jane, the cook, and Alice, the maid-of-all-work, as the reward of their clear-sighted sympathy, each got a piece of it to dream on. Next morning they, no doubt, confided to each other both the dream and its interpretation.

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PART II.

CHAPTER I.

IN GLEN CAOILE.

'Far from gay cities, and the ways of men.'

Odyssey, xiv. (Pope).

'The whole of this coast presents a most singular mountain outline. . . . Like the other mountains of this extraordinary shore,
it has every advantage that can arise from independence of position—
rising, a huge and solitary cone, from the high land beneath, and lifting its dark precipice in unattended majesty to the clouds. All around
is barrenness and desertion: except where some lake, glittering bright
in the sunshine, gives life, a still life, to the scene; and the eye ranges
far and wide over the land, seeing nothing but the white quartz summits of Canisp, Coycraig, and Ben Mòr, the long streams of stones
that descend from their sides, and the brown waste of heath around.'—
MACCULLOCH'S Tour in the Highlands, vol. ii. p. 355.

'When now the North his boisterous rage has spent, And peaceful sleeps the liquid element: The low-hung vapours, motionless and still, Rest on the summits of the shaded hill, Till the mass scatters as the winds arise, Dispersed and broken, thro' the ruffled skies.'

Iliad, book v. (Pope).

CHAPTER I.

'Alba nan' fomadh sruth: Alba nan' fomadh caoil.' Which, being interpreted, means, 'Scotland of the many streams; Scotland of the many firths.'

My readers have already sojourned with me on that east coast of Scotland which may truly be said to be 'of the many waves,' and I must ask them now to visit, along with my heroine, the west coast of Sutherland, which is more emphatically 'nan' tomadh caoil,' 1 a land of many firths, or inlets of the sea.

By the shore of Glen Caoile (the *strait*, or *narrow* glen) there runs a narrow road—a streak of warm yellowish gravel, pleasantly visible on an expanse of brown moorland, studded as that is with grey rocks, and with many little lakelets in which the water-lilies float.

Along this road Marion Ford is being driven to
1 Cavil, pronounced kyle.

day by her uncle, Mr. Hugh Matheson, who is the tenant of the great sheep-farm of Tordarach, distant about two miles from the lower extremity of Glen Caoile. As his gig only moves at a footpace, there is time for us to recognise the girl's face.

Nine months have passed over her head since we last saw Marion Ford at Netherbyres—one of those vacant periods which so often occur, planted in between one pain and another, in the lives of provincial women. Nine months of solitude: of harvest and of ingathering, and then of winter; nine months also of suffering, for the power of a separation from anyone we have learned to love, is far greater, and more heartrending, than we know till we have tried it.

Moreover, the gifts of love and sympathy, and the pure joy, which Marion had once been so ready to give, had all, like Noah's messenger bird, returned to herself again. For them no meet or safe resting-place had been found; and, though of a generous and unresentful nature, Marion, as a woman, had suffered deeply. It had been long, also, before she could cease to blame herself for the natural candour of an ingenuous heart, for the blushes of her modest face,

and for the tears and smiles of her young eyes. Surely she was unjust to herself, for, however much captivated by her lover Marion might have been, there had been really nothing to be ashamed of in the courageous self-forgetfulness of a warm-hearted woman.

Marion's solitary winter was one of which a great French writer would have been justified in saying that its dreary cold had been 'as a crime.' Then came March, when the year is apt to keep the promise of the spring in the letter, by reason of its lengthening days, but to break it in the spirit by reason of its bitter winds and of its late snowstorms.

On one of those inclement days Marion got a severe chill, and was then laid up with a rheumatic fever, which disabled her for even more than the usual six weeks.

The pain was very great, and Christy Blake very neglectful, by reason of her preoccupations in the village; and so Marion, left alone all day, would sometimes see the light begin from the east in the morning, and finish in the west of an evening, without any break in the monotony of her imprisonment. The confinement to one room luckily did not fret

her, only the little face grew very small, and the strangely pathetic, brown eyes very large indeed, as she lay there, stiff, silent, and submissive, and in a solitude which was peopled only for her by the lost idols of the memory or of the heart.

Old Dr. Miller now and then came in person to visit her; and one day Marion thanked him for a favour shown to very few since his accident of last year.

'Eh, dawtie! I am no' so sure that it is such a favour, for I am but a past, old body now. But, as it makes my bad, old heart ache to think of you lying there all alone, if I can't come to cure you I can just come to crack with you.'

One day, when her recovery was almost complete, the old man told her about Dr. Robert Fairlie's marriage to a cousin whose parents had brought a lawsuit against his father. How Dr. Miller came to be possessed of those facts I cannot tell, except that in this world everybody's love is Polichinel's secret, and everybody's reverses are matters of housetop publicity. At all events, Dr. Miller had got hold of the story; and, after telling it to Marion, he asked her if she had heard anything of it before. She did

not start, or blush, but a sort of spasm passed over the pretty, patient face as she answered gently, 'No;' and the water stood in her eyes when she wasked Dr. Miller to open the window, and to let her have a little more air.

'It is not more air, it's warmer and better air that ye want, dawtie. Ye want it to set you up, and ye want it to put some flesh on these bits of bones of yours.' And as he spoke he touched pitifully one of the girl's thin hands. 'I have been speaking to your father already about getting you sent to the Highlands. You have got all your mother's friends living in Sutherland still, I am thinking?'

'Yes, my Uncle Hugh and his daughters are all at Tordarach, I believe, though I have not had any letters from my cousins Katie and Alexa since the time that poor mother died. They both wrote to me then'

- 'Are they nice young lassies? I hope they are.'
- 'Alexa is two years older than I am, and Katie is two years younger. I hear that Katie is very delicate; but she was a very pretty girl when we were all together at Strathpeffer, now five years ago. Both

of them have a great look of mother, and eyes like Hugh's.'

'Well, your father is ready to send you to them; and your uncle Hugh will be ready for you by the time that you are ready for the trip.'

It was in this way that Marion Ford's Highland journey was first arranged. It actually came to pass at midsummer; and thus it is that we find her skirting a wild, sea loch on the west coast of Sutherland.

It is the hour of high-water, but there is no wind, and the grey and silver tide creeps quietly about the feet of the hills. A little coasting steamer lies half-beached on the southern promontory of this cacil, or inlet. Beyond it the ground rises in brown, swelling slopes of moorland. All here is broad, and prodigal of space, yet to-day these slopes, vast as they may be, appear even wider and wilder than the reality, for the heads of the great hills are all, for the moment, hidden in mist. But this expanse of waste is mapped out, as it were, by huge, grey boulders, or by bluffs of those primary rocks that here lie so near the surface. It is also broken now and again by falling rivulets, or

by thickets of the mountain birch-trees that, wrapped in a dreamy mist, cluster along the sides of the little sheltered dells.

It has rained all the morning, but it is now eleven o'clock; and, though the rain still falls, there are a dozen little signs of a happy impending change in the weather. The temperature is higher; some skylarks rise perpendicularly; the grouse get up with a loud whirr as the passing carriage-wheels startle them from among the heather; the birch-trees, like the bog-myrtle, throw out a wondrous perfume; and, lo! the sun begins to struggle through the clouds. As Marion watches it a slant sunbeam, piercing the drifting fleeces of vapour, falls on the brown pool below the road. There is a wild tangle of blackberry and cloudberry, wild breath of bog-myrtle and juniper. of mellick, and of rosemary, wild cry of plover and of curlew, and bleat of lambs: but in all this beautiful desert there is no voice of man, nor any footfall save the sound of their horse' feet, as Marion and her uncle, after walking slowly up a long hill, made a sharp turn to the right, just where the river enters a little, inland lake.

'That is Sul-Bhvein,' says Mr. Matheson as he points to a great stack of dark red conglomerate, a pinnacle of purple strength, over 1,000 feet in height, now rearing its solemn and solitary beauty against a sky from which the curtain of the mist had suddenly risen.

'What a wonder!' Marion cried; and to eyes accustomed only to the monotonous, rolling contours of the Grampians, this panorama of the mountains was striking indeed. They stood defined against a limpid sky of purest, palest blue; while the sky itself, by its long, parallel lines of faint clouds, suggested the breadth and the level of the Western Sea.

'We are not far from home now,' said her uncle; 'there is the farm; and no doubt Alexa and the dogs will come down to the ford to meet you. Poor Katie is not fit for that, or for anything else now.'

'I did not know till last month that she was such a sufferer,' said Marion.

The farmer shook his head.

'Poor girlie! she is far gone in a decline; indeed, she is just passing her time; and I doubt if she will do more than see Alexa's marriage in the back-end of harvest.'

- 'You are glad about Alexa, are you not?'
- 'I am really well pleased at it. She has got an honest, kindly lad. You heard about it? He is a Munro, of Obsdale. His father, Gustavus, is of that family, and they all come from Ferrindonald, and have always made a good appearance. She will do very well. Katie was never like her sister; she had a crook in her lot; but she was a bonny bit thing though, as ever you saw—"Katie Ruadh," as they called her in the county-side.'
 - 'What does that mean, uncle?'
 - 'I was forgetting that you have no Gaelic; but your mother had galore—she ought to have taught you. It means "auburn," for the lassie had an extraordinary head of hair. You will be kind to my Katie, Marion? especially if I have to take Alexa to Glasgow for a week, to buy her things. If I do, you will be kind to Katie?' repeated Mr. Matheson, in a husky voice, as he shook the reins of his horse, and bade it quicken its pace in the neighbourhood of its stable.

The ford was crossed in safety; and on its other

side, as Hugh Matheson had predicted, his eldest daughter stood.

The two cousins shook hands and kissed each other; and when the frisks and barks of Suildhu and Busdhu! had been suppressed, Marion was taken into the house: 'for Katie has been wearying for you all day, and vexing herself at the rain.'

'Oh, it was not very wet,' answered Marion; 'and now how fine it is!'

Alexa Matheson led the way upstairs, and, opening the door, ushered Marion into a room of which your first impression would have been that it was uninhabited, so still and so shrunken was its only occupant. Katie Matheson, a fragile-looking young girl of about eighteen, lay on a bed near the window.

'You are kindly welcome to Glen Caoile,' said a voice from the bed; and Marion, advancing to it, stooped, and kissed her youngest cousin, Mr. Matheson's invalid and favourite child.

But she felt shy with both Alexa and Katie; she had never seen them in their home before; and when

¹ Suildhu, black-eyed, Busdhu, black-mouthed.

they had last met at Strathpeffer her own mother had been alive, and they had been light-hearted, young girls, who played all day long on the slopes of Cnoc-farril, or wandered through the woods to Loch Ussie. While she stood there wondering that anything alive should be so thin and transparent-looking as Katie, old Annach Gunn entered.

Annach Gunn, better known as the muihme mòr, or the 'great nurse,' was the most important person at Tordarach. She called Marion 'Muireall,' and told her that she remembered Mrs. Ford before her marriage, and her departure for the South; in fact, she still spoke of her as of 'her poor bairn Effie,' when her talk rambled from her long-past wedding to that of Alexa, which was to take place in autumn.

The course of Alexa's love had run smooth—without either fear, or quarrel, or doubt. Gustavus Munro was four years older than his bride; he had always been a good son, was in business, and steady, and had a dozen reputable cousins in Ferrindonald. Moreover, he was, like his bride, an ardent adherent of the Free Church; so that Alexa had only one trouble in her life—when she married she must leave Katie.

'But sisters were not meant to live together,' suggested Marion, trying to console her, when at bedtime Alexa stole to her room, and unbosomed her mind of this and of other matters concerning herself. Would Marion really stay here, and take care of Katic, when her father took her to Glasgow? If she went it would have to be before the preachings; and when she returned Gustavus Munro, and his parents, would come to Glen Caoile, and then Marion would see them all, and make friends with her new cousin.

Yes, Marion would gladly take care of Katie if her uncle and Alexa went to Glasgow for a week.

'It will be my first sight of Glasgow, and of Inverness,' added Alexa, with her eyes sparkling; only leaving Katie is hard; and if it is hard for a week, what will it be for me when I go away for good?'

Marion did not answer what she thought, namely, that even before Alexa should have bestowed herself in wedlock, 'Auburn Katie' would be gone where there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage, but where all are as the angels.

CHAPTER II.

THE COUSINS.

'The second sight is an impression made, either by the mind upon the eye, or by the eye upon the mind, by which things distant or future are perceived, and seen as if they were present. This receptive faculty, for power it cannot be called, is neither voluntary nor constant. The appearances have no dependence upon choice; they cannot be summoned, detained, or recalled. The impression is sudden, and the effect often painful.'—DR. JOHNSON'S Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland.

CHAPTER II.

'Do you feel it lonesome here, Marion?' asked her cousins of a guest who, finding that during a Highland midsummer night there are not more than three hours of darkness, had slept but lightly, and had risen at least ten times since the dawn, to look at the hills, and to listen to the lapping of the tide in the deep-winding caoil.

The farmhouse, with its dependencies, and its big peat-stacks, stood on a small plot of rather ragged meadow-grass, which served as a playground for the dogs, and for *Fiusach* (bearded), Alexa's pet kid. Behind the farm the ground dropped suddenly to the ford by which the house was approached, but on the other side of the river the hills rose again at once, forming a dark and frowning rampart of at least one hundred feet in height above the level of its nearest pool.

The ledges of these hills are at midsummer green with little fields that have never known the scythe, and these were all gay now with patches of wild flowers. Down their slope, not two hundred yards from the windows of the farm, a streamlet falls, and this stream, from beating against the rocks, gets broken into three little cascades, which, through a group of trembling birches, and an inner veil of ferns and delicate stonecrops, find their way at last to the caoil. The dash, the spring, the fanciful sparkle of this stream by day, and its white rush, spread over the hill's flank like a veil of silver by night, were all matters of wonder to Marion.

'But don't you find it rather lonesome at first?'

'No, I don't think I shall be lonesome here,' she replied, though, in truth, the solitude must have appeared very curious to one accustomed to the Kirkton and the Fisherton, and to a constant sense of neighbourhood to populous Easterhaven, with its trade and its many ships.

The sheep-farm which Hugh Matheson rented had an area of about twelve square miles, with scenery of the most savage and impressive kind. At

Tordarach he lived fifteen miles from a post-office, or from a doctor, and, except the farm and its offices, there was no roof visible for miles—nothing nearer than the ferry at the mouth of the *caoil*, or than the shooting lodge at Ardenns, which was only occupied during three months of the year.

Alexa took her cousin out after supper, and after exhibiting her to the shepherds, and to their dey (dairywoman), then showed her, in return, the dairy, and the boats, and the big, old broadsword that had been got in a 'moss' one day. She also taught the newcomer to tell the hour of the day by the sun's place, and the direction of the wind by the way in which the cormorants down in the caoil were setting their wings open to windward to dry them. 'Look at the wind on the canna, too,' said Alexa; and in truth all the snowy beards of the cotton-grass might be seen bending in one way before the western breeze. 'One can always tell the north by the side of the tree that the lichen's beard grows on,' added the Highland girl.

'Why do you know all these things? And what is the use of them?' said Marion.

'Why, to find one's way home when the mist comes suddenly out of the hill, and one would be lost. Sometimes one can go by the way the stream is running; but, if there should be no burn to guide one, then one must have different ways of knowing the points of the compass, and steer by them.'

'There are a great many things to learn about Highland life: you will have something to do in teaching me.'

'Oh, Annach is the person to tell you all the secrets, and the wise ways. She won't begin any work on a Monday, or look at the new moon through a pane of glass, or speak of the fairies except on a Friday, on which day they are all supposed to be absent. It is their Sunday. She hears the bell ringing before anyone dies; and, if it rains on a Friday, she tells you it will rain on a Sunday, and then that a wet Sunday brings a wet week. As it rains nearly every day in Assynt she cannot be proved to be wrong, and is proud of being right. But now let us go home; for it is getting late, and Katie must have her supper. It ought to be low-water in the caoil about six to-night, and you see that the cows are going down there

already.' Truly it was as the farmer's daughter said: the black and dappled herd of dairy cows might now be seen making their way, without a guardian, to the edge of the tidal inlet. 'They do this every day because they like the salt, and they are never wrong about the hours of the tide,' added Alexa, laughing.

When the two girls went in they found the minime mor endeavouring, with many a 'Muileag mo cridke!' (Darling of my heart), to persuade Katie to swallow some rice-and-milk. Alexa took the basin from her, and sitting down, began to feed her sister, while she and Marion chatted of the intended visit to Glasgow, of the purchases to be made there, and of the glimpse of the bridegroom which was to be had by the way.

After a week Mr. Matheson and his daughter did leave for Glasgow; but by this time Marion had become quite domesticated at Tordarach, and fit, as the be trusted with the dogs and the kid, as the her poor, invalid cousin.

and favoured is that Highland home that hectic member, for pulmonary consumpbane of the Celtic race in these northern provinces. 'Auburn Katie's' case was an advanced one, with all the fever, and with the exhausting night-sweats of her cruel complaint. She had very bright blue eyes and a quantity of auburn hair under a little, white cap, and, Marion thought, must have been a prettier girl than Alexa. But she was very serious, and was visited sometimes by a grim-looking old elder, whose thoughts and words all seemed strange to Marion; so that the new-comer often felt shy of speaking to her cousin on mere worldly topics. One day, however, Marion asked her if she never felt sorry that she lay there, all alone and weak, while others were gay, and while Alexa had all the world before her, and a happy home for her heart.

Katie's eyes looked very grave for a moment, and then she said, 'What can it matter to me? You know that my time is short; and, as old Annach says, "I have my wings." I don't know are they better than Alexa's happy life, but they are just the Lord's best Will for me.'

Then there was silence, till Katie, seeing that Marion was crying, said gently, 'Do not cry for me. I may be but little worthy of the Kingdom, but the

Lord will receive me; and we don't know but that the dreams of that long sleep may be sweet: and I have no wish to live.'

'But why, Katie? For, oh! it is bonny out there, with the sun glancing on the sea, and the lark singing in the sky. Only the people in the world make it darksome. If you could be like Alexa would you not be fain to live?'

Instead of replying to this question Katie asked, 'Have you been happy, Marion?'

'It has been uphill work sometimes. And it is the going against wind and tide that tires a woman out.'

'But you will marry yet, Marion.'

Marion shook her head. 'What would be the use of it if I do not like anyone? And then—love is such a terrible thing: so full of pain!'

'It is that,' replied Katie, lying back on her pillow, with a stifled sigh. 'No one knows all the pain that can be in it,' she added softly, and then both cousins held their peace for a time. The Celtic nature, ever full of wonder and sorrow concerning life and death, is easily moved either to joy or to grief, but it clings

to the latter because it believes in its truth, and has seen it to be more lasting than happiness. To the Highlanders most things put on, therefore, their grave or fateful side. The omens and prognostications of this people are all sombre, and these two girls had natures as receptive of pain as others are of pleasure. Pure, and shy, and proud, they were outwardly irresponsive, but inwardly sensitive to every word or breath, and they seemed to draw pain to themselves as other women are greedy of flattery, or profit, or success.

'Love is a strange thing,' said Katie at length, 'and to feel long and deeply for anyone takes all one's strength away. I am too short of breath now for much speaking, but I am coming near the hour of truth, and before I take myself home I would like, Marion, to tell you why I do not greatly care to live. Though I have had no word is he living or is he dead, yet I believe, by the Sight that I have, that he is gone.'

This speech puzzled Marion completely. She had heard her mother dilate on the 'second sight,' and during the fortnight she had spent at Tordarach she

had picked up some hints about it, and its possession by the invalid; still it was startling to hear Katie allude to it in this direct way; and what, oh! what had been her relations with the person now supposed by her to be dead?

'What are you speaking about?' she asked at length.

In answer Katie began to feel for something under her pillow, and finally she drew out a small volume. It was a book, hardly five inches long, though nearly an inch thick, and bound in vellum, which had more than one stain on its boards. 'Can you read that?' she asked.

'That is Greek,' replied Marion. 'I used to help Hughie with his lessons, and I once could read the New Testament a little.'

'Can you tell what this is?'

'The word on the page is "Eschylus," but I don't know what it means, or what this is about: "Vol. I. Oxonii. Typis N. Bliss: et W. H. Lunn ad Bibliothecum classicam, in Soho Square, Londini.
MDCCCIX."'

Katie now drew her attention to a plate on the

inside of the boards. It bore a coat-of-arms, of which the crest was a horse's head; there were also some letters in red ink, 'T. IV.' (probably referring to the place in the shelves or catalogue of a library), and on a ribbon under the shield were the words 'Viscount Hildenborough.'

'That was his name,' said Katie quietly, as she replaced the book, but not till she had gazed for aminute, and probably for the hundredth time, at the delicate Greek characters, which, to her, were as undecipherable and as mystery-concealing as life itself.

She then began a tale, which, as it was often interrupted, and broken by explanations and comments, and questions, as well as by the narrator's weakness, I prefer to condense for my readers. It is offered to them simply as the story of Katie's Keepsake.

She commenced it as follows.

CHAPTER III. KATIE'S KEEPSAKE.

'Nausicaa there

Stood, moulded by the gods exceeding fair—
She, on the rooftree pillar leaning, heard
Odysseus; turning, she beheld him near—
Deep in her breast admiring wonder stirred,
And in a low, sweet voice she spake this winged word,
"Hail, stranger-guest!"

Odyssey, viii. (Worsley).

CHAPTER III.

'LAST year, a little before midsummer, two English gentlemen came here to fish the river. It was a dry season, and the river ran low—so low that we fished for pearls below the Hawk's Pool; but they put a boat on Loch-na-Ghillie; and as for the *caoil*, they were out on it both late and early.

Sometimes we saw them coming and going by our ford. We knew that one of them was young and slim, and swift of foot; that was him they called Captain John Gage. He had reddish, fair hair and light red-brown eyes, that had a hard look in them. There was always a big, black dog at his heels, called Leo'; and he smoked a great deal. He was in the Guards of the Queen, he said, and he lived in London.

The elder man was grey all over; though I don't know what his age might have been. Alexa said, when we first saw him, that he was like the fairy

herdsman in Glen Odhar, where the kine were all driven by an drive: agus è liath (one man, and he grey). Yes, for he had some grey about his hair, and he had grey-green eyes, like the sea when the wind blows across a shoal water; and the suit that he wore was of bluish-grey plaiding. He was tall—six feet, I believe—and with wide shoulders: he threw the line grandly in the Hawk's Pool, and his voice was sweet and strong when we heard him calling to the boatmen, as they went up and down the caoil.

We were told that the two strangers were cousins. The English lord told me later that he had himself been an only child, and that he was unmarried, and that this young man was his heir. He was a gentle-minded man, but I do not for all that think that the young officer loved him. They lived in the two rooms beyond our dairy, for the Lodge that is now at Newton-of-Ardenns was unfinished, and still wanted its roof. Jane McKay, our dey, waited on them; and the men that served them, besides Dickenson, their English keeper, were 'Illiam beag (little William) Gunn, John McLeod, and Donnachion, his boy.

Until the evening of the 18th of July I had never spoken with either of these strangers.

They had been fishing on that day for 'podlies' at Port-an-Suvanaig, and my father, having business there, met in with them; and, coming back with them in their boat, they fell to speaking of all the ports and caoils, and harbours of this shore, and of Port-an-Suvanaig, where Lord Hildenborough said that a queen's ship might lie.

'Well, if an old story is to be believed,' my father replied, 'a king's ship once came into it, and that is how it came by its name, which before was *Pol Ghamhna dhuine* (pool of the dun, or brown, steer).

The two gentlemen asked what the name meant; and my father said that Sweno, the son of the King of Norway, had been wrecked and murdered there long ago. 'But,' said my father, 'if you want to know all the names, and all the sgialachdan (tales) that the old people tell, and all the ursgeuil (fables) that the old women believe, not to speak of all the songs the boatmen sing, you should ask them, not of me, but of my daughter Katie—she knows them all; so does her old nurse, Annach Gunn; but as Annach has little

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English you cannot well get them from her. Katie can tell you all about Port-an-Suvanaig, and Pol Ghamhna-dhuine.'

Then Lord Hildenborough asked if he might send us some of their take of fish, and if he might come in the evening and hear the story of Sweno; and my father, who was well pleased, said 'Surely' and 'Yes' to him.

That night he came—they both came. It was half-past nine, and they had had their dinner. I was standing, winding yarn, and leaning on the fireplace, when they entered. They had their backs to the light, so that, though nearer to me, I did not see the faces of them as well, perhaps, as I had seen them when coming and going by the ford. Lord Hildenborough, when he had bowed to us, took the arm-chair opposite me, for I had sat down on the settle, and he said that they had come to pay their respects to us, and, with my father's permission, to hear from me the history of the most beautiful spot in the world.

'You are a stranger, and it is beautiful because it is new to you,' I said.

- 'Yes, but I have travelled a great deal, and have never seen anything so fine.'
 - 'Where do you stay yourself?' I asked.
- 'In England, and in London; but I have lived abroad a great deal: in Venice, which is on the sea, and in the sea. But now tell me about Sweno, and his port.'

'It had to be a fateful port to Sweno, and so it proved. He was a king's son; and his stepmother, who was a wise woman, told him before he started, to beware of Point of Storr, and of Pol Ghamhnadhuine. He sailed, and he sailed, and he sailed, till a wind that was wild, cast his vessel ashore in this place. Then the highlanders and islanders came out to him, and he asked what place it was. So they told him that was the Ruadh Storr, and this was Pol Ghamhnadhuine. "Then," said he, "the Lord have mercy on my soul if that be the Ruadh Storr." The men of the place robbed his ship, taking the red gold out of it in their plaids, and one of them killed the king's son. So he died, and the place is called Port-an-Suvanaig to this day.'

While I was telling them this story, and how the man who had killed the king's son saw his wraith,

and was himself drowned, at the fishing, within the year and the day, the room was getting dark, and our fire low. My father bade Alexa put some peats on the fire

Alexa went and fetched an armful of them. The young gentleman offered to help her; but my father laughed, and said Alexa knew the ways of her own hearth best. I see it all as if it were now. She was a pretty lassie as she knelt there, between me and the grey lord's feet. First she put on the peats with her white hands, and then she blew them with her innocent, red mouth. When she rose up she was laughing, and the peats blazed, and the light of their flames shot far into the room.

Lord Hildenborough moved a little, and bent forward. I screamed; and when I came to myself (for I had fainted) I found myself in my bed, with old Annach beating my hands. 'Ach, ach! Maithel, Maithel, bochd!' (Alas, my poor good dear!) she cried, 'has it taken you again? What did you see, and on whom did you see the cuis umhais?' (cause of terror).

But I would not tell her.

The next evening Lord Hildenborough came in

alone, as he said, to inquire for my health. I answered him that it was good; but I felt that I got pale at the sight of him.

'I am afraid that you are not very strong,' he said; and I heard that he had pressed on my father some of the red, French wine that his cousin thought so much of, and had built into a peat-stack, to keep it from the weather.

The next day was a wild one. You have not seen yet, Marion, what that can be like on this coast. The seas and the skies rave together, and the air cannot have enough of weeping and complaining. The next day was just as wild, and Lord Hildenborough and his cousin were fain to keep indoors, for it was not weather in which to put a dog outside. They sat here for a great while, and I sat by the fire. The young captain and Alexa tied flies, and Alexa tried him with riddles in Gaelic, like this:—

'I see to me, I see from me,

Two miles, and ten miles, over the sea,

The man that rides in the green boatie:

And his shirt is sewed with a thread of red.'

That means the rainbow; but she had to tell him, I suppose. Lord Hildenborough and my father

spoke of the tides, and the farm, and the rent, and the removals, when the people were sent away from the Sutherland glens to Canada. With me he spoke of the rocks, and I told him of the dyes that we make from the wild flowers, and the pearls we got in the river above Pol-na-Suirean (Pool of the Siren), and that set us off again on stories. I told him about the demon angler of Sallachie, that turned into a pillar of fire; and the jewel in the hill of Stack, that no one can find; and the Giants' Cave of Tigh-mòr-na-Albanach, where all the giants sleep. There they will sleep till some man finds his way to them, and wakes them with the third blast of their own horn.

'For my part,' he said, 'I think I am in the cave, and I hope that no one will waken me, on any pretence whatever.'

His voice was very sweet when he spoke; but he was always sad, as if there was no hope beyond the mountains.

For those few happy days I saw him come and go, and we often spoke together. Now, Annach had always been asking me to tell her what was the warning I had seen on the first night that the strangers came

to us, and at last I told her. Then she wept, and he said, 'Muileag! muileag bochd! (Darling! poor arling!) all the Englishman is in your heart.'

'Then, Annach,' said I, 'the Lord have mercy pon him and me, for I saw the streak of blood round is mouth: at the right-hand corner of it; I saw it in him by the light of the fire.'

About a week after this, when they were in our house one night, the young man wanted to hear of the dobhran dhuine (the dun otter) that 'Illiam beag had told him about.

'It has a fine skin, that is sure,' said my father.

'But you need not believe, unless you like, that he is the seventh otter, and the king of six who feed him.'

'He has a white star on his forehead, and one on his breast,' put in Alexa, 'and he can only be killed at those two spots.'

'I would give a sovereign to see the beast,' said the Captain.'

'You can do that easily,' answered Alexa, 'for Sandach and Rory Murraghson, at the Ferry, have one just now.'

'Let me advise you to lose no time in looking

after it, then,' said my father. 'The sailors snap up these skins whenever they get a chance. They are supposed to carry great luck with him.'

'By George!' said the Captain, 'that's the very thing for me.'

So they settled to go down to the Ferry next day, and they begged that we would all go, to prevent, as they said, the ferrymen from giving them any other skin than the lucky one. They were to catch seatrout, and we were to broil them for breakfast near the holly-trees. Alexa was pleased, and she promised to cut the skewers of bog-myrtle to broil their fish on.

But I did not go. I was warned of God in a dream, and I got up betimes, and slipped away upon the pony. They went down to the Ferry, and they did not get the skin. It had been sold.

'Why did you not accompany us, Miss Katie?' asked Lord Hildenborough that evening.

'Crazy Bellach, at Loch Sard, was ill, and I went to her early, and I came back late.'

'So I see. But you have put away my luck, and we have come back in consequence without the charm. What do you expect to come of that?'

'I am very sorry,' I answered, laughing; 'and rather than put your luck away, I will give you a cnothan 'a Mhachair' (a nut of the Outland).

'What is that?' he asked; and I showed him one of those smooth, brown beans that the sea brings from America.

'Yes,' he said, 'that really is a tropical bean. The Gulf Stream has brought it. What are its powers?'

'It is good against fire, and for tipsy people; and against the evil eye.'

'It hardly suits my present case. Have you nothing else to recommend?'

'If I had a four-leaved clover I would give it to you at once.'

'What might it do for me?'

'If you had found it for yourself, or if it was picked on Sunday, it could do you neither good nor harm; but if it was found, and given you by a friend, it can bring you health and wealth, and your heart's desire.'

'Ah!'

'But *this*,' I said—and I took a stone from my Pocket—'this is a celebrated charm.'

'Where in the world does this come from? This

is a bit of serpentine, and there are no rocks of that sort on this coast.'

'It is a pebble from Holy Iona, and it makes for good to them that carry it. Will you take mine, and keep it?'

'Thank you; I will gladly keep your pebble, Miss Katie.' And he put it in his pocket.

I do not know what ailed him that evening, but though the shadows were drawing all round, he sat there, with his arm thrown over the back of the bench, for a long time, shaking his foot up and down in an odd, impatient way he had. He spoke about his travels, and said he must now always go towards the West. I did not understand at first that he meant dropping downwards, towards the sun. He said it did not matter now to anyone.

'But,' I said, 'you must do a great deal of good with your riches?'

'It is rather late. Though you are right—the only things worth living for are the stray bits of good one can do. Now good night, Miss Katie. You are tired.' And he went his way, and I went mine. The next morning he was gone. Since I have got weak, and

annot rise any more from my bed, they give me some f the red, French wine which they say he left for ne. Whenever it touches my lips I remember that was his gift. And now, Marion, that is all.

- 'You have never seen him again?' asked Marion.
- 'Not yet,' answered Katie simply. 'Not yet; hough I keep that little book beside me, thinking it nay bring me a sight of him in a dream. I believe hat he is gone—because the year is already out.'

Poor Katie was right: Lord Hildenborough was lead, having met his death five months later by an accident in the streets of London.

It was in the spring, after his visit to Glen Caoile, on a cold evening in March, and just after the lamps were lit, that a cab-horse fell on the most slippery part of the hill in Piccadilly.

The gentleman who was in the hansom was in the act of springing out of it, when a struggle of the prostrate animal flung him forward on to the kerbstone, and he was, as far as the nearest policeman could judge, killed on the spot. Lord Hildenborough was at all events taken up insensible. He was immediately recognised, there being no figure more family

liar about St. James's Street than the master of Byewood Hall, the sometime owner of the celebrated racehorses 'Constable' and 'Rialto.' Yet when they picked him up, and had carried him to the accident ward of St. George's Hospital, there was some difficulty in finding anyone to advise what was to be done next. Captain John Gage, to whom the matter ought to have been referred, was on duty at the Tower; and an old Miss Lechmere, who lived in Upper Grosvenor Street, and who was a near relation, was in bed, with bronchitis. The expectation of an important debate, and of a great speech from the Chancellor of the Exchequer, had, by the time that the House went to prayers, already filled its benches, and therefore served to empty the clubs.

But two friends from the Travellers were at last found, who went off to St. George's, and there identified what, alas! was no longer a living man.

One of them left immediately to send off a telegram to Captain Gage; the other remained for some time, and after looking long at the well-known face in its fixed, unalterable repose, charitably stooped, and wiped from the pale lips the thin streak of

blood that stained one corner of the nostrils and of the mouth. It was the only external sign of the violence of the blow that had proved fatal to the brain of Hubert Lechmere Gage, second Viscount Hildenborough.

After some days there was a pompous funeral at Byewood, and a troop of the Yeomanry regiment, of which Lord Hildenborough had been the colonel, followed him to the grave. He was laid in the vault which Mr. Speaker Gage, soon after he got his peerage, had prepared for the line of the Viscounts Hildenborough, of Byewood and King's Standing, in the county of Kent.

The 'hard heir' soon began 'to stride about the lands,' the hop-grounds, and the paddocks. Loudly did Captain John Gage bewail his fate that his cousin should have elected to be killed in the end of March, seeing that his horses had engagements for all the great races. 'If,' he continued, 'the yearlings don't sell well in June it really will be just like my luck; with such a thundering succession duty as there is to pay too!'

The executors naturally opened every drawer and

desk in Byewood. Captain Gage felt a little curiosity as to his cousin's past, but he found nothing there to gratify it—no traces of Lord Hildenborough's loves, hates, friendships, or secrets, except that portrait of the Marchesa Guastaldi, by Cabanel, which hung in the red corridor, and which could not be called a secret. It was a masterpiece of art, and the face, with its golden hair and liquid eyes, might have passed for that of Innocence itself. It was, alas! that of the most vain, cruel, and rapacious woman in whose veins the blood of a Polish Jewess ever ran, or who had ever, after twelve years of falsehood, broken the heart of a straightforward Englishman.

Only in the despatch-box which Lord Hilden-borough commonly used they found his mother's gold-rimmed eyeglass, and her wedding-ring. Beside these relics there lay a little pebble about the size of a walnut. It was apparently of serpentine, or of white quartz, injected with veins of the most beautiful green. It was wave-worn, and evidently a thing of relivable, so it could only have come there by mistake.

What Captain John Gage had the reverence, cirreverence, to do with the old lady's eyeglass are

ring it boots not to inquire, but as for the pebble he simply threw it out of the window.

There, trodden under foot of men, among the Kentish gravel, and the chalky dust, poor Katie's Keepsake lies.

Some Sundays after the funeral the rector of St. Matthias-in-Byewood preached from this text: 'That which is wanting cannot be numbered, and that which is crooked cannot be made straight.' He wound up his sermon by quoting from the same book of ancient and mournful experience: 'Men are soon forgotten in the city where they have done so—and this also is vanity!'



CHAPTER IV. AMONG THE HILLS.

- 'The time so tranquil is and still,
 That nowhere shall we find,
 Save on some high and barren hill,
 An air of sweeping wind.
- 'So silent is the sessile air
 That every cry and call
 The hills and dales and forests fair
 Again repeat them all.
- 'All labourers draw hame at even,
 And can till ither say,
 "Thanks to the gracious God of heaven,
 Quilk sent this summer day."

Quod ALEXANDER HUME OF POLWORTH.



CHAPTER IV.

healing process which Dr. Miller had anticipated Marion's visit to the Highlands had already m. Only it had originated, less from the air or ge of scene, than from a cause of which the kind Doctor could guess nothing. It began from a tion to the fading, young cousin who now lay on confines of two worlds, and who had just confided arion her singular and artless romance.

catie's story haunted her, and it opened for on's consideration a page of experience which of the greatest use to her. In the first place, it her out of herself, and it also showed her that brown, springing from causes for which no one properly be blamed, may have a divine purpose and what we can read, or guess. No power of tring which has unselfishness for its source ought regretted by us; and we must be patient under

those troubles which do not spring from the ground, but from the permission of the Father, who, while He thinks fit to bruise, trains us to the stronger virtue and for the more perfect Love.

In the case of Katie and of Lord Hildenborough the attraction had really been mutual, though the sentiment in the one breast differed from that experienced in the other, as a white rose differs from a red. In the English peer Katie was the furthest remove from passion or intrigue that he could conceive: she rested his heart, as a green field rests the eye after a labyrinth of heated, glaring streets, and there was a something in her face that seemed to beckon him to another country.

Already, consciously or unconsciously to himself, the shadows were growing very long, and his night was approaching. Spiritual influences were already at work in his heart, humbling, softening, and purifying it, and these brought him in sympathy with Katie's solitary and pure nature. It is to be doubted whether all the preachers in Britain could have shed across his mind a ray as vivid and as searching as did this artless girl. He felt at Glen Caoile as if he

were in the fabulous Giants' Cave; as if the pains and passions of his life were laid asleep, and this gentle, and rather visionary creature was that 'fair spirit for his minister' after which many a man has longed. He had been right in the high opinion he formed of her probity, disinterestedness, and goodness; right also in estimating all the disparity of age, station, and education which existed, and must always exist, between them; most right in leaving the place, the moment that his experienced eye noted in the girl's breast the rise of a sentiment with which she was firm enough to struggle.

Nor would it be at all fair, either by Lord Hildenborough or by Katie, to say that she was now dying of a broken heart. Her life must, at all events, and under the best of circumstances, have been a very short one, though it is quite possible that in its diaphanous condition (in which many things became clear to it that elude the normal vision of the healthy and the fortunate), her imagination had been strongly occupied by him, even before her heart was touched. A nature like hers could not escape learning what Love means; and, brief as her life was to be, she was

sure to put a great deal into it. She was dying now, and was yet neither discontented, nor disappointed, nor astonished, only content with her silent ministry of patient prayer. Lord Hildenborough one day, when seized by an impulse of confession such as even the most reserved natures sometimes experience, told her that his life had been a stormy one, wearied by much of what saddens and defiles a man. From that day Katie bore his sins in her own heart; she interceded for him, and washed with many a secret tear the stains she could not comprehend, but which she guessed had become a pain and a burden to her strange friend.

Let those mock her who will, but let none dare to measure the far-reaching influence of those prayers, or to forbid those ministrations of interceding love. Who knows if such are not our best prayers—better far than the strong crying and tears with which some of the clamour for happiness at Heaven's high gate? Who knows that Katie's humble, sighing breath did travel with Lord Hildenborough back to his the man who was so soon to die a sudden

and a lonely death? These are of the things between 'heaven and earth' that lie outside of our 'philosophy' and of our vision, but which go far to redeem the selfishness, the grossness, and the utilitarianism of our society.

When Mr. Matheson and Alexa returned from Glasgow they found a very tender friendship established between Katie and her cousin; and Marion, when Alexa's bridegroom joined the party, was thankful to find that she could see without an envious pang the intercourse of the betrothed lovers. She had rather looked forward to it with dread. It was true that she had for some months accorded to the man who had loved her, but left her without a word, one of those pardons which, if they are not synonymous with contempt, yet have a good deal of contempt in their composition. After she learned from old Dr. Miller the circumstances that had determined Dr. Fairlie's marriage, he had been somewhat rehabilitated in her good opinion. If his honour stood in dishonour he was to be praised for having considered first his father's credit or safety; and now, by the side of Katie's bed, Marion was learning to

think more patiently of personal troubles, to be glad when no wrong has been done, rather than to resent where a pang has been inflicted, and above all to let the dead past bury its dead.

The week after Mr. Matheson's return was the one known throughout the parish as the 'preachings'; that is to say, it was the one in which the yearly celebration of the Lord's Supper took place.

These 'preachings' begin on the Thursday, and, early in the week the house of Tordarach began to fill with guests. Staying there were the bridegroom, with his father and mother; the Rev. Norman Gray, a minister from Easter Ross; and Angus McKay, an elder from a distant part of Sutherland; for these open-air services, happening at the finest season of the year, draw hearers and communicants from all parts of the country.

Angus McKay was an old man who spent his whole summer in this manner, going from one parish to the other. It was a way of life that not only made him happy, but had gained for him a reputation of extraordinary piety. Like the Indian fakir

and the Russian pilgrim, he was always welcome, privileged, and even thought to bring a blessing with him to the house where he might be pleased to lodge.

He arrived at Tordarach on the Wednesday, and Marion could not but smile at his appearance, though her cousins saw nothing remarkable in his thick, ribbed stockings, knee-breeches, broad bonnet, and long blue cloak. He dismounted from a small and very shaggy pony, which was then hobbled with a heather rope, and left to feed on the grass plat before the door. On crossing the threshold he stopped, smiled pleasantly, and said, 'Biannachd Dia na sho' (The benediction of God be here). Everyone in return greeted him warmly, and on seeing that Marion was a stranger, he bowed low, shook her by the hand, and asked her, 'From which of the glens are you?'

At supper the old man was garrulous, but both his idioms and his allusions puzzled Marion. Yet how much he had to tell of the crowd that attended the preachings in the parish of C——; of the 'action sermon' preached in the parish of R——by precious Mr. Ross; of how Mr. Allan had been

'searching' when he fenced the tables and 'shooed'1 away sinners, but, on the other hand, had encouraged pious souls to approach. In one parish the weather had been fine; in another the congregations had sat for five days in heavy rain; here the elders had taken the shine out of the minister; there again the pastor had proved himself mighty in the word. In the last place which Angus had visited his spirit had been sorely vexed, for, instead of Psalms, mere 'human hymns' had been introduced into the thanksgiving service of the Monday. To Angus' mind these were an abomination only second to 'printed prayers,' which he thought might possibly come next; so he had shaken the very dust of that parish off his feet, and had mounted his 'shelty,' secure against innovations at the hands of the 'ministeir mòr' who had the charge in Glen Caoile.

On the Thursday morning this Angus, though the oldest person in the company, proved the earliest riser in the house, and was in a great hurry to make his way to the place of meeting, and to join the

^{1 &#}x27;Shooed,' the noise made when driving away fowls, sheep, or

groups on the edge of Loch Bad-an-darach (Lake of the Oaks), where the service was to be held.

Marion soon saw that everyone went to it—the young, the old, the wise, and the foolish. Elders and 'men' of noted piety came from far, but so did women and children. In white caps, and in thick homespun cloaks they came, all rejoicing in the sunshine of the day, while many of those who had stockings and shoes carried them in their hands for show, as they preferred to 'travel' the distance barefoot. Barefoot came Silly Murragh, wandering along the road, with his hands clasped behind his back, in the familiar attitude of dragging his red cow after him at the end of a long rope—only, for this occasion, the cow was left behind.

Marion, sitting by the window, described him and other passers-by to Katie, who, in her turn, could give the name, and history, of every man, woman, or child. 'Silly Murragh would not miss the preachings for the world,' Katie said. 'He comes every year; and, if you wait, you will see another curious creature, Mairy gorach, the crazy woman, who went mad when her brother was drowned in the foundering of a brig in Loch Inchard.'

Katie spoke truly, for before long Crazy Mary appeared, muttering to herself as she went, 'Brave is the day for Donnachion and Marichion, brother and sister, that were born of godly parents.' Even the lunatic was right to rejoice in the day, for never sunshine more exquisite was seen to sparkle on the sea, or to light the purple promontories of this rocky and indented shore.

But about two in the afternoon the scene suddenly changed. To Marion, who was unfamiliar with the phenomena of the mountain mists, this was almost a terrifying experience. It began by a cloud not bigger than a girl's head would need to rest upon; then suddenly, as sorrow creeps over a trusting heart, the cloudy gloom descended. It gathered in volume an Coil density every moment, as if by incantation. after coil, veil after veil, fold after fold of its coll joylessness overlaid the hills, and then purple cres 5 and shadowy corries were lost to sight. An indefinit pensiveness reigned over all, and the groups of peopl and ponies, when they returned from the 'preachings loomed ghostlike and gigantic through the driftin vapours.

Letters reached Glen Caoile twice a week, and or

Saturday Marion's holiday in the Highlands was rudely broken by a letter from home.

'What is the matter?' asked both her cousins in a breath, seeing Marion drop her letter in her lap with a face of dismay.

'Father is ill, and in trouble, and obliged to go to Forfar on business of my Uncle David's. He has the big mills at Brigton, in Strathmore, and I fear, from what father says, that he is bankrupt.'

'Will it put your father much about?'

'I fear he lent money to Uncle David, or went security for him. I know there was something that went wrong at Brigton six years ago. My father says I must come home at once, as he is a good deal in Strathmore, and Christy wishes to leave.'

'We only get letters twice a week,' cried Alexa, 'and it is terrible when they bring us such bad news, and you can't hear again till Wednesday.'

'But I must go long before that. I must be at Netherbyres by Wednesday.'

'I don't believe you can,' replied Alexa, 'for on the great Sunday of the year you *cannot* travel, nor yet, I suppose, on the Monday. The mail-gig will not pass again till Wednesday; but perhaps on Tuesday father could send you as far as Lairg.'

'Please ask him what I can do,' said Marion. 'I must get home; yet I am very sorry to leave Glen Caoile.'

'It is hard,' answered Alexa, 'that just when you had got to be at home here, you should be obliged to leave us.'

'Health comes in measures, but in high billows come ailment and trouble. We brought nothing into the world, and it is just so much that we can have here, or that we can take out of it,' put in old Annach, in very garbled English, while she patted Katie, whose eyes during this discussion had filled with tears.

'I wanted to keep her to the end,' whispered the dying girl to her nurse in Gaelic.

'Hisht! mo maoth-bhlath! (my tender blosson sweet will be the fields beyond the River.'

Katie said nothing more. She would, indee gladly have kept her cousin: her one bit of earth beauty. 'I can see the sea when I raise myself ar look out,' she told Marion, 'but it is often sad ar clouded, and the mist comes down, and the rain fall

but when you sit by my bed, my eyes have no mist over your beauty.'

'Oh! Katie, hush! And what has it done for me? Maybe if I had been less well-favoured, but different, it might all have been better for me.'

Evidently the pain of Marion's wound rankled still. It was impossible for her to leave Tordarach before Tuesday, as Mr. Matheson soon proved to her. On Sunday, the Sunday of the Suipeir-an-Tighearna (Supper of the Lord), no one could travel, and on Monday he could not leave home, or a circle of guests which would then include the 'ministeir mòr' himself. So she had to resign herself to the delay, and yield also to Alexa's entreaties that she would go with them to the open-air service on the edge of Loch Bad-an-darach. In vain she protested that, as she did not understand a sentence in Gaelic, she had rather stay at home with Katie: to that no one would consent; so the Psalms Were marked for her in an English Bible, and thus Prepared Marion formed part of a congregation of over four hundred persons collected for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, and for the 'action sermon' of their favourite preacher.

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The crowd had gathered itself round a small pulpit and table which occupied the hillock known far and near as 'Cnoc Mhicrath,' or Macrae's Mount, but the moorland that swept away up to the foot of the hills, was covered with groups of people, with carts, and tethered 'shelties.' Marion, on the contrary, was seated below the crowd, and rather nearer to the edge of the lake. No breeze stirred its expanse, over which the wild fowl skimmed or floated, while round its brink, where only an imperceptible ripple broke at Marion's feet, the pale blue lobelias drooped. Low bluffs of rocks surrounded it, but through a gap of this amphitheatre the eye caught the line of the sapphire horizon and the shimmer of the sea.

Now rose the Psalm, the 118th, first read line by line, and then chaunted in Gaelic by the whole congregation. To one who had never heard it before, this murmur of sound, as it rose and fell, and died away among the rocks, was truly striking, as were the groups that moved to and from the sacred table. Marion's heart thrilled with the solemn thanksgiving that followed the Communion. It was the 103rd Psalm:—

'Oh, thou, my soul, bless God the Lord, And all that in me is; Be stirred up by His holy name To magnify and bless.'

In that thanksgiving lay perhaps the secret of the nappiness Marion had asked in vain from life, and at which she was only beginning to guess, namely, the dedication to God of all the forces, thoughts, wants, wishes, and capacities for joy or sorrow in the human creature.

The very beauty of the scene gave a calm to the Sirl's mind.

Here, through the long days of a Northern summer—here, where the osprey builds, and where the fox and the wild cat have their beds—here, where the lowers put on their beauty, and yearly doff it again, there having been seen of none, except of some stray hepherd who goes to seek among the ledges of the ocks for that which was lost—here, if anywhere, re might learn to grow resigned to disappointment, ailure, oblivion, and loss.

By the time that Marion again reached the farm the sun had set, and the distant hills were all aflame with the rose, and gold, and purple glory the evening had flung over their ridges of quartzose strength.

CHAPTER V. HOUSEHOLD JARS.

'Pray, Goody, please to moderate
The rancour of your tongue.'

KANE O'HARA'S Midas.

CHAPTER V.

Sturbed atmosphere. Questions of money agitated father; he was often absent, always irritable, and open war with Christy, who had announced a parture, which Marion for one was not at first clined to regret.

It happened, however, that on the Sunday after arion's return, Kenneth Ford was suddenly taken

They were obliged to send for a doctor; d when the doctor told Marion that the farmer d had a slight paralytic shock, she found the task nursing him, and of keeping him from dwells on his reverses, almost more than she could mage.

She then begged Christy to remain with them for other month; for the old woman, though cross and rannical, was both strong and capable.

But Christy was inexorable. She maintained that her family in Aberdeen had need of her.

'Then it'll be the first time that we ever heard tell o' sic a case,' observed Janet Bowman, the dairy-maid, the only official who for strength of lungs and caustic qualities of the tongue could at all compete with Christy. 'If they are asking for you there I dinna ken myself what thae folk mean.' And with that remark Janet left the field to her foe. Marion's pleading was all in vain.

'This unsaught hoose is no' the place for me and as for the auld man I have no patience for him are aye girning at a body, and scolding, wi' his mouthall drawn to one side. I have nae muckle need o' gear, or of my penny fee, and I canna stop, so ye will need get some ither body to clean your pewter and your shoon. Kenneth Ford,' she added, turning sharply on the old farmer, 'if ye will tak' my word for it, you will just make up your mind to your bed for a month. Ye will no' miss the Coorts o' the Sanctuary as muckle as some ither folk; and ye may be thankful ye are no roupit out like your brither, the bankrupt miller, but

dwelling in your ain howff. It is where I will bethis day week.'

This being her servant's ultimatum, Marion started off, full of cares, early the next morning to Mrs. Butchart's shop, to see if she could hear of some one to replace Christy.

Standing behind the counter beside Mrs. Butchart, there was a tall, handsome, young woman of about twenty-seven years of age.

'Why, that is Jenny!' cried Marion, before even declaring her errand.

'She's hame from Brechin, and she's to bide at hame noo,' said old Andrew Butchart, with a glance of pride at his daughter.

'Are you going to get married, Jenny?' Marion asked; but before the young woman could answer for herself, her father said, rubbing his hands as he spoke:

'Aye is she; and to nane but Robby Tosh: what do you think o' that?'

In a moment Marion saw the bearing of this piece of news on Christy Blake's sudden departure, and in spite of herself, and of all her vexations, she smiled

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as she looked at Jenny's handsome face. Old Mr. Butchart and his wife read her thoughts, and they burst into a peal of laughter, in which it must be said that Jenny herself joined heartily. To make it worse, or better, Robby entered at that moment, anxious to eat his dordermeat in the company of his betrothed. Marion felt that the time was unfavourable for entering into the question of a new servant for Netherbyres, so she left the shop. But she had not gone many yards before she was overtaken by Robby, who, touching his bonnet to her, said, 'Ye should wish me joy, Miss Ford.'

- 'I do indeed, Robby. Jenny is as fine a lass as there is in the whole parish.'
 - 'And she's as gude as she's bonny.'
 - 'You have not taken long to settle it.'
- 'It needed little settling. She came home from service, and I foregathered wi'her, it may be some five or six times. I spak'her ceevil, and she was willing and when I pressed her to take an auld carl like me she did not say me nay.'
 - 'You are a lucky man.'

¹ Bannock, eaten about twelve o'clock by farm-servants.

'I am. Some folk say it is because I am the eventh son of a seventh son, in a family without any laughters. I ken na how that may be, but I aye sked the Lord to keep me from three things: from ving in an ill place, from serving an ill master, and from taking an ill woman. I just telt Christy lake that last,' he added, with a sly grin at Tarion.

'Surely you are not going to leave the Manse?'

'Ye will not catch me do thât, Miss Ford. Some olk are so upsetting as to say he is no a sappy reacher, but you man has the goodness o' the hail Jeneral Assembly, let alone of the Synod of Angus and Mearns, in his ain heart. He's to gie us a new oom over the stable; for he says, "The wifie should have her ain corner, and her ain kettle." But there's a terrible stir wi' Miss Clementina aboot the rooms. She's mair daft nor ever she was. But if she was fifty times waur nor she is, I would not change from the Manse. And there's the pigs: maybe ye dinna care to see them, though that pigs will make grând hams, if they are spared. But step you in to the Manse gairden the noo', and I'll just gie ye a nip of

Fascination. Did ye ever see a better giranium nor

'But can Miss Esslemont spare it?' said Marion, seeing that Robby, in his zeal, was taking very large cuttings off his favourite plants.

'There's mair here nor Miss Esslemont can destroy. But come you away before she sees you. You are the last body in the parish that she will want to see under her windows.'

'Why?' said Marion. 'What harm can I do her? Why should she dislike me?'

'Why? Because you are bonny, and because she is daft.'

'That is no reason.'

'And when did ye meet wi' reason in daft folk? Never fash your head wi' them, and at the back end o' the year ye shall hae cuttings enough and to spare. I should have had a good few dahlias the year, but some thief of a rat made away wi' the half o' the roots when they were lying bye in the loft. Come away noo.' And with these words Robby showed Marion out of the Manse garden, which, with its bright geraniums, and its scents of rosemary, and marigolds, and thyme,

and its broad borders of sea-pinks, was the delight of the servant's heart. Robby on this occasion, however, followed Marion with his eyes.

'My certy! this tongue of mine was very near letting the cat oot o' the bag this day. The minister would be wild wi' me if he thought I even kenned the bush that the hare sits under. But I'll gie her a hint o' it, some of these days. What for should he set his heart on a lass like Merran Ford, and never get a chance wi' her. And why should she wander her lane sel' without a sweetheart, on Sunday or Monday, and never hear what is waiting for her? No doubt but wi' you woman there will be an unco stoor till it's done, and over. If she was mine I would just put her to the Asylum in Easterhaven; for, tho' it's well kent that he puts the very hair o' his head under her feet, there's no pleasing her. The lass complains o' the cold in July, they say, and it's ower true so far as she is concerned, and it would be a grand day for us all if it was the Lord's will to tak' her awa' oot o' this sinful world.'



CHAPTER VI.

SURPRISES.

'It is the unexpected which always happens.'-Proverb.

Is great to grant as mighty to make,
And creates the love to reward the love:
So I claim you still for my own love's sake.'

RROWNING.

CHAPTER VI.

E Reverend George Esslemont sat alone in his ly on an afternoon early in February. This ter's day, albeit a very fine one, was well past its n, yet the sun shone brightly into his western dow. The minister had been reading steadily for uple of hours: working up some passages in the mma,' as if he were about to be critically mined in St. Thomas Aquinas; and when he at last, he left the floor, like his table, covered 1 books.

An uncommon event had happened that mornin his household: Miss Clementina had both ressed a wish to go to Easterhaven for the day, I had positively consented to be driven thither by bby in the gig.

Not only, therefore, was Mr. Esslemont alone in Manse, but there was silence in the stables; and

from the little court at the back of the house there came no sound of voices and no clatter of hoofs. In fact, the silence was broken only now and agair by the fall of a cinder in the study grate, or by the distant rumble of a cart that had happened to passibefore the Fore Doors, or down the village street towards the distillery, and the mills.

Oh! empty house! Ah! silent room! There was something almost cell-like about the latter, ance the Solitary who inhabited it when he rose up stirrect his fire, and then stood for a moment on the rug, as if to enjoy its newly-awakened glow.

Suddenly the house-door bell rang.

Then came the shuffling tread of Eppy, the maid as she hurried out of her kitchen to learn the visitor's errand; then steps again, and a voice. But whose i Not Marion Ford's, surely? Yet none other, for Eppy, flinging open the study-door, now said, 'Miss Ford, if you please, sir.' And there, in very truth, his pretty neighbour stood.

She was dressed, as on Sundays, in that dark, green, tartan gown which was a remembrance of Sutherland, and besides the shawl over her arm, she

carried in her hands a little, black, leather bag and a newspaper.

The latter she held out to Mr. Esslemont, almost before he had shaken hands with her. 'Oh! Mr. Esslemont, we have such news to-day!'

'Good, I hope.'

'Hughie is alive: I am certain that he is. He is coming to Liverpool, and he will be there to-morrow, or next day.'

'I am truly glad. Has he written to you?'

'No, no; it is all in that newspaper. Only two hours ago I read it there. Father was tired, and fell asleep; he dropped his paper, I took it up, and there I found this wonderful news. Read it,' she added, apparently still breathless and agitated by the suddenness of her discovery, and of her own pre-Parations to meet and claim her long-lost brother.

'You ought to read it to me, since you know it,' said Mr. Esslemont, placing the girl on the sofa, and taking a chair in front of her. In truth, one hurried glance along the columns of the newspaper, had revealed to the master of the house that he was far too preoccupied by the advent and

presence of his young visitor to see anythin distinctly.

Marion read:-

'Liverpool: Wednesday n

'After an absence of four years the Pho phic Society returns to Liverpool, to hold its meeting for 1860. Our readers will lear pleasure that the preparations for the sittings Photographic Societies are now well advance conversazione in the Museum of Science and 1 the 13th instant, will inaugurate the proce-The honour of entertaining members, asso and foreign delegates devolves this year on pool, and her citizens will certainly not allow hospitalities to fall behind those of Berlin, B1 and New York. The exhibits will be very nun especially in the branch of enlarged portrait Ghémar, of Brussels, will, we understand, r paper on his method; one which has gained for in Brussels, as well as in Nice, so large an amo royal patronage. Among the experiments interest attaches to a new method of preparit plates, which it is thought may supersede the S Wortley process, and which, as it has been used in America for military and for surveying purposes, may lead to its adoption in military circles here. The sensitive qualities of the plate are preserved to an extent, and for a length of time, hitherto unattained in this country. This process comes to us from America, but its inventor, Mr. Hugh Matheson Ford, is a Scotchman, who has taken out a patent for it in New York. Mr. Hugh Matheson Ford is a passenger in the ss. "Caledonia"; and he, Mr. Justus, of New York, and Colonel Longridge, the new American Consul-General for Liverpool, are expected to arrive on the 12th.—Fournal of the Photographic Society."

Marion, who had read these paragraphs with triumph, laid down the paper, and said, 'That must be Hughie. Are you not sure that it is?'

'I truly hope it.'

'My father was very much upset when I read it to him; and look here, lower down, among the shipping intelligence, I found that the "Caledonia" had landed some mails at Queenstown, and is now on her way to Liverpool. I went straight upstairs and put some things into my bag, and then I asked him

to let me go and meet Hughie. At first my father would not hear of it. He said that if Hugh did not choose to come home he might as well—indeed, he had far better—stay away. But I got a sort of leave at last. It is just the *one* chance of bringing them together again, as mother would have wished. If this is lost it may never come again, or come too late, for my father, as you know, is feeble, feeble now. I have counted the hours, and I think I can be there before the "Caledonia" gets in, so that I may meet him when he lands. If I do not find him then it may take me a long time to search him out "Hugh Matheson Ford" can only be Hughie; and I am sure that if I can get there I shall know him.'

'Then you are going to Liverpool?'

'I am on my way now to the station. The train starts at 4.20, you know; but I came first to tell you the news.'

'It is kind of you. You know that no one takes more interest in it than I do.'

'You know only too well all that this would have been to poor mother. My father is only half-gla

about it. But you will go and see him;—speak to him about mother, I dare not. It will, maybe, soften his heart towards Hughie, whom she missed so much.'

'I will certainly do so. I will do everything that is in my power. I shall be only too glad to do so. God grant His blessing.'

'I also came to ask you if you would lend me some money. We have not as much money in the house as will pay for my tickets; and though I do not expect to be more than a day in Liverpool, I ought to have a little over. Will you lend me some? My father does not like my borrowing, or owing it at Mrs. Butchart's shop.' And Marion coloured as she spoke, with a blush that referred to her family's well-known embarrassments.

'I shall be only too glad to lend you all the money that is in the house. It is not much, I fear, as only to-day Robbie was to call at the Royal Bank, and cash a cheque for me; but all that there is is very much at your service.'

'Eppy told me that Miss Esslemont was from home, but I thought that I might ask for you.'

'You would have vexed me very much if you had not, or had trusted to anyone else.'

'It has all been so sudden. Everything comes when one does not expect it,' said Marion, sitting back on the sofa, and now for the first time beginning to draw her breath quietly; while Mr. Esslemont unlocked a drawer, and searched in it for all the money that the house contained.

'Now let us see,' he said, again placing himself in front of Marion.

'You mean let us see how much I have got to begin with,' said the girl laughing, as she emptied a netted purse into her lap. '£3 17s. 9d.,' she said, after counting it over twice.

Mr. Esslemont laid £4 beside it and said 'Pardon me, but I think there is some silve' in a box in my room, and it will make it safe if we add that also. But have you had tea, Missi Ford?'

Marion said, 'No; and I have not had any dinneeither to-day,' she added, laughing. 'I meant to ge some food at Perth, where we shall be about sever o'clock. It has all been such a hurry at home.

hardly two hours yet since I took up that wspaper.'

'I will tell Eppy to bring you some tea,' replied e minister; and with these words he disappeared, aving Marion in solitary possession of the study, hich in her mind was so strangely associated with lugh's last day at home, and with his visit to the ninister, to speak to him about the fatal picture. Dear Hughie!' said Marion to herself. 'I wonder what he is like now, and if he will know me? I am sure I shall know him, for he has mother's eyes.'

So occupied was Marion with these anticipations that she hardly missed her host, though he remained absent for some minutes. Eppy was the first to appear, and she brought in the tea-tray and kettle. The latter she placed on the hob, saying as she did so that the minister had desired her to bring it ben at once, and to ask Miss Ford to be so good as to make the tea

Marion gave a glance at the clock; and, seeing that it yet wanted an hour and forty minutes of the time of her train, she set about her task with alacrity.

She was on her knees, pouring water from the bigkettle, when Mr. Esslemont entered.

'You must allow me to add these twelve shillings to the sum already in your purse.'

'Oh! thank you. I can never thank you enough for being so helpful to me.'

'It is all very much at your service,' was the reply; but it was made in such an odd, stiff, grave voice that Marion looked up, kettle in hand, to see if her host was in any way displeased at her. He was certainly very pale, and instead of meeting her eyes he looked over her head. Did he think it forward of her that she seemed to have become all at once so much at home, kneeling thus by his study fire? Or was he annoyed at her request for a loan? Surely, among neighbours and old friends, neither of these were great crimes, especially when an only brother was in the case—one who had been lost and was now found. No one either knew as well as did Mr. Esslemont, all that Hughie had cost her and her poor mothe

Marion wondered not a little at the grave coldness of his manner since he rejoined her. He walked the window, and looked out, and left her to arrange.

her tea-tray in silence; and when that part of her task was finished, and she had moved away from it, so as to leave the duties of hospitality to him, he only said, in the same constrained voice, 'May I ask you to take the trouble to give yourself some tea?'

'And to make some for you too,' said Marion; but in answer to that offer Mr. Esslemont at first only turned his back.

It was some moments before composure began to return to her host's mind or face. In very truth when he had re-entered his study, and beheld there, alone, and in charge of his hearth, the little creature who had for more than three years been his daily and nightly preoccupation, his heart had for a moment almost forgotten to beat. It had been with difficulty that he found any voice, or any words, in which to address her. He had felt for a moment as if real life had ended and dreamland had begun; as if the Prayer he had prayed seven times a day for so many months had suddenly been granted; as if sorrow and solitude had passed away; and as if his angel, folding her great wings, had at last become his household deity, his love's crown, and his wife.

To this impression Mr. Esslemont now actually in part surrendered himself, and it was, therefore, Marion who spoke the most frequently during their improvised and *tête-d-tête* meal. He was for the most part silent, either watching her pretty, housewifely ways, or by a question making her go over again all her plans and her hopes of meeting Hugh.

Mr. Esslemont was himself so happy in her sweet company that he became as sanguine as herself.

'I wish with all my heart that I could go with you, and see your meeting with your brother; but as I cannot do so, you must at least allow me to take you to the station. Robby is not at home, so you must walk. I will see you off, and put you into a carriage with some *douce* woman who is going on through the night; or at any rate I can speak to the guard about you.'

Marion smiled all her thanks.

'Thank you,' she said; 'you are very kind; no one is so kind.'

'Ah! do not say that. I have never in my life been allowed to do more than begin to be kind to anyone.'

- 'I can't believe that.'
- 'It is true, however. A minister spends his whole life guessing at his people's wants and burdens. He tries to know them, and is himself never really known.'
- 'I never thought of that,' said Marion, glancing quickly at her companion's face as they left the study.

Then side by side they walked to the door; side by side they stood on the gravel; and then side by side they trod the path that led across the fields to the station.



CHAPTER VII. WAITING FOR THE TRAIN.

'Here runs the highway to the town,
There the green lane descends,
Thro' which I walked to church with her:
Ah! gentlest of my friends.'

Longfellow.

CHAPTER VII.

IRS was a walk of about twenty minutes. The l, February day that was now drawing to its e was one of those in which, though the season winter, we realize that the earth is not really l, but only sleeping. Nothing as yet has, it rue, roused her from her torpor; still, you feel inctively that she has ten thousand times ten sand gifts of fruits, and flowers, and grain in e for cattle and birds, and for the children of l.

"These all wait upon Thee, and Thou givest n their meat in due season," said Marion to self, for she felt in her own heart all the happy nise of the earth, and of the seasons.

She was wonderfully thankful, trustful, and happy; step barely pressed the grass under her feet; and companion noticed the bright colour that had come into her delicate face as she walked quietly by his side.

Ah! why was she not always there and, above all, always thus? Would she never be his? Is it possible to ask for a blessing seven times a day and yet never obtain it from heaven? Is it possible either for a girl to let a man walk beside her breathing his dumb but urgent prayer for one touch of her hand, and one sweet word from her mouth, and yet remain quite insensible to him? No, thank God! the thrill within and around the girl was as the echo of his prayer. Something of its magnetism touched Marion to-day; and, in thinking of this walk, Mr. Esslemont dared afterwards to believe, that if much had been mutely expressed on his side, certainly something had also passed on hers, which she was not as yell able to put into words.

They made their way quickly across the village—and then they took the path that begins where the high road ends, and which forms a short cut to the station. They crossed the stream on its little bridge of planks, and then, as the ground rose, they could see the levels of the railway that stretched away befor

them. Some lights twinkled about the station; and far to the westward, against the sunset glow, which in lingering arched itself far into the night, there spread the large horizon of the hills.

It appeared that Marion would still have half an hour to wait for her train.

It was a shabby little roadside station which they entered at the close of the day. The west wind blew into it, and it contained only one long bench under a long shed. There were some fishtrucks in a siding, with red lamps moving fitfully about, and the platform was roughly covered with cinders. Yet to Mr. Esslemont the place seemed like Eden, and the muddy stream that gurgled away through its sedgy grasses, was to him as Pison that came through Havilah, 'wherein was gold.'

No wonder! For here was Marion, not only asking for his help, as she might have done before, but trusting herself to him, while he was actually waiting upon her. Oddly enough, it was the first time that he had ever had a chance of doing so, and that for two reasons: first, because Marion's life was generally all spent and given up to others, so that she never

seemed to need, or to ask for, the most trifling, personal attention. Another reason was, that during all the period of her distress he had not once ventured to intrude on one of the shyest and proudest of natures of a country where a shy pride is a very familiar type. Since the hour of Mrs. Ford's death, when he had carried Marion insensible in his arms, and had laid her down, still insensible, in her own room, he had never been alone with her for a second, and had never assisted her, except in matters of business, along with her father.

She now spoke of her father, and again asked him to go and prepare the way, if possible, for Hugh's reception. Mr. Esslemont promised to devote himself to that cause, and while discussing this subject they walked up and down in the gloaming, with the soft west wind in their faces. Then came a difference of opinion as to a change of carriages to be made either at Larbert or at Carstairs, and a time-table had to be consulted. Marion laughed, but Mr. Esslemont's hand trembled as, by the light of a station-lamp, their two heads bent over one small book, and Marion ran her finger up and down the columns of figures.

At last her train was signalled. Then came the ting, the shawl that had to be put over her feet, injunctions to the guard, the smiling thanks, the ssure of the hand, the suppressed 'God bless you!' I then the door was shut.

The train moved away, and when its red lamp I been swallowed up by the darkness, the minister aced his steps to the Kirkton.

As he went he lived over again that hour of set and trustful companionship. He said to himthat no creature was so exquisite, because none so perfectly balanced between tenderness and y, because none had so womanly and so simple ignity, along with so childlike a heart.

As he walked he prayed. He prayed that He, o had been Love's Alpha, would also vouchsafe to its Omega; and this he asked, not from any supertious conceit that either he or Marion were the sole jects of Divine solicitude, but, as one of the chilen of the great family, he relied on the wisdom of Father to whom 'belongeth mercy.'



CHAPTER VIII.

THE SKELETON IN THE HOUSE.

'God! God! My sense, my soul, my all,
Dies in the cry.
Saw'st thou that faint star flame and fall?
Lord! it was I——'

F. Myers.

CHAPTER VIII.

E upon a time there came to an Indian town a strange and old. The people, taking him to holy man, crowded round him. 'Avoid me,' ! the stranger, 'for I carry with me fate, and and fire.' They searched the man, and found ing on him but a bit of cloth, a string of beads. a small brass lota. Then they laughed at their fears. The man took a drop of honey from a xposed for sale, and, smearing it on the nearest passed out of the town. Before the fakir had : a rood's length some flies, settling on the ey, began to eat it. From a crevice in the wall e crept out a lizard, and it began to make a meal he flies. A cat, crawling stealthily up, surprised lizard, and caught it. While playing with her the cat was seized by a neighbour's dog, and ried. The owner of the cat and the master of the dog, hearing the uproar, ran out with sticks. Soon two corpses lay in the street, and each man accused the other of having killed his favourite. The one dragged the other before the judge. Sentence was given in favour of the dog, in spite of his having certainly been the offender. The cat had her partisans in the town, and a riot took place; houses were burnt, and the unjust judge stoned. Then troops were sent to establish order; but the soldiers, being several months in arrears for their pay, took sides with the rioters and seized the fort. A neighbouring rajah took the opportunity to march into the town. A war began, which lasted for many months, and not one stone was left standing upon the other. The inhabitants, when starving in the jungle, had ample time to remember that the fakir, with his drop of honey, had caused all this fire and fury, and their own too unhappy fate.

Love, when it enters a man's heart scatters firebrands, for

> Love was never yet without The fear, the agony, the doubt;

and when love enters a family it often does like the

ndian fakir, and with its drop of honey causes a great deal of trouble and strife.

Mr. Esslemont, when he reached the Manse, was till under the influence of the sweet hour and of the visit which had seemed to foreshadow a lifelong oy.

'Well, Robby,' he cried cheerfully to his servant, who was rubbing down the mare in front of the stables, 'is it all right?'

'The siller is on the table—sax notes and some shillings—and Mr. Burns' note for the coals,' replied Robby laconically, without looking up from the heels of Grizzel.

'The mare went well, I suppose?'

"Deed did she. Come over, Grizzy!" cried the servant, patting the creature's dappled flank.

'And nothing went wrong?'

'It was all right as far as I had to do wi' it,'

Plied Robby in a tone which made Mr. Esslemont

hink it might not be all right now.

His heart sank within him, and rapidly into the background faded that vision of peace and of the angel by the hearth.

He entered the house, hung up his hat, and walked into the parlour, where, in a more or less suffering and more or less perverse state, he expected to find his sister.

But Miss Clementina was not there.

'Eppy,' he called, 'is Miss Esslemont gone to her room?'

'She's to her bed,' replied the maid; and Mr. Esslemont went up stairs.

He knocked; but getting no answer, opened the door of Miss Esslemont's room gently.

'Dear Clemmy!' he said, approaching the bed, 'you have not caught cold, I hope? The evening has been so mild, so delightful, surely it could not do you harm; and Robby says that the mare came home at a capital trot.'

Still no answer.

'Clemmy! are you ill? Pray speak to me.'

Still the same silence: and Miss Esslemont who lay with her face to the wall, gave no signs o moving.

What could have occurred? It had been wrong of him to trust her alone to Robby. She wa

generally on bad terms with the servants; and Robby, who had a caustic tongue, might have taken offence at something, probably in the interests of his darling Grizzy, and had in his turn offended her.

'Has anything happened to annoy you at Easterhaven or on the way home?' asked the minister in despair; but to this question, as to the previous ones, Miss Esslemont youchsafed no answer.

'Shall I wait dinner for you, or is Eppy to bring you some? I don't know what there is for dinner,' added Mr. Esslemont, endeavouring to draw his sister into talk on some safe topic.

But in the present state of affairs the prospect of dinner was powerless, and he went down stairs again, annoyed, but not surprised, at an exhibition of displeasure for which he could not exactly account.

He had to eat his dinner alone, and, under pretence of not having another fire lit for himself, he had it brought to him in the study. Ah! if Marion had but been there! Where was she now? Hurrying through the dark, thinking of Hugh, and forgetting, perhaps, the hour that for him, at least, had been so hopeful and so sweet. 'Ask Miss Esslemont if she would like me to sit with her this evening or not,' he called to Eppy, who was about to disappear.

'I need not ask her,' was the reply; for our servants always know more of our affairs than we do ourselves, and Scotch servants are very blunt in their speech.

'What is the matter, Eppy? Has Robby offended Miss Esslemont, or is she really the worse for her drive home in the dusk?'

'It's neither Robby nor her meat, nor yet the gloaming, that ails her; but she comes home, and she sees two cups in the tray in the study, and then she goes up like a tap of tow: just clean daft like—"Who's been here?" cries she. "It was Miss Ford," says I. "And where's my brother?" "He's away to the station wi' her." She was that angered she just tilted the whole tray on to the floor; and look see! broke this saucer and, waur nor that, this jug! And Eppy displayed the fragments of broken ching with a face of wrathful grief.

'They all belonged to my mother,' said the minister, with a sigh; and when Eppy had left the

room he stood before the fire with a very dark cloud on his brow.

Whenever, in hope or in despair, the minister of Lumgair had contemplated marriage he must have done so with many misgivings. Even now, grant him to be sure of gaining a place in Marion's affections, was she prepared to share with him in the charge of his sister? And how was Miss Esslemont prepared to receive a young mistress of the Manse? Evidently very ill; and, what was worse, this fit of jealous passion would, through the servants, spread through the parish reports which coupled his name with Marion's. If they never reached her they were still annoying. It was the last thing he wished to have buzzed about among the village gossips. Marion's sudden journey to Liverpool was, of course, a sufficient explanation of her visit to the Manse; but still, as that is a wise girl who is never spoken of, so that is a prudent minister who never gives occasion for detraction. Then, if Marion did hear any gossip about herself and him, it might ruin all his plans.

He meant to act slowly and surely—not to hurry

her, not to frighten her, not to make that 'more haste' which in wooing is sometimes the 'worse speed.'

He wondered what line would be the best for him to pursue with Clementina:—to ignore the whole affair of Marion's visit, and to treat it (as it had been) as an accident; or, to reason with his sister, and so prepare her-gently, but firmly-for the fact that he wished to marry, and in doing so still to assure her of his continued affection and care. The first of these two plans would have been the wiser of them. But the minister of Lumgair had spoilt his sister. Clementina had got so accustomed to her brother's unqualified self-sacrifice, that she presumed on her position, and on its privileges. Sensitive natures do not care to encounter perpetual struggles about trifles, so it often happens that in a house the weaker and the inferior rules; and generous people often make mistakes by which they afterwards find their own hands bound. George Esslemont's devotion to his sister had rendered his own life lonely in no common degree: always beside him, she could not be his companion. but she would not suffer anyone else to be so. She did not put forward as her reason the morbid jealousy

which she felt, but she pleaded rather her unfitness for the company of strangers, and the effect of society upon her health. Often sullen, one day defiant, and the next full of terrors, she was really wilful to imperiousness, and generally maddened by an over-lively sense of what concerned herself.

How was all this to be dealt with if the minister married? For, even supposing Marion won, could he ask her to share such a task with him?

To the onerous, monotonous charge of his sister he had long accustomed himself, and he made it a point of honour never to leave her to the charge of servants for more than a couple of days at a time. For him, therefore, there had come to be in the course of the year no little interludes, no breaks, and no intercourse, except by letter, with more congenial minds. Yet he had resigned himself to solitude and to discomfort, as we can resign ourselves to a thing that affects no one else; but now, if he thought of Marion, it all appeared from a different point of view. Now, for her sake, he realized the great annoyance that small, senseless worries can give, and the tyranny of habit. He felt angry now at a neglected meal, at a peevish com-

plaint, at the dull restlessness of their daily routine, and at a dozen small proofs of disorder and discomfort that before might have been passed over without notice.

If Charity's enduring joy be real, so, alas! are the flames of martyrdom, and there are actions of which we do not realize beforehand all the possible consequences. Such had been his adoption of Clementina, with the burden of her wrecked understanding, and of all her wayward misery.

That evening the minister went up and spent half an hour with his sister. At first she remained sullenly silent; then, all of a sudden, she raised her voice, and she broke into a passion of incoherent complaints and wild reproaches. She had never been anything but miserable, and now he proposed to turn her out of the house for the sake of a girl picked up by the side of the dyke, who was throwing herself at his head. Everybody knew that these Fords were ruined.

It was true that Marion had urged her father to use the portion of the inheritance that was to have been her own for the immediate liquidation of the miller's debts, and of his own liabilities. Mr. Esslemont's heart welled when he thought of it. His darling was poronless enough—that was true, but only all the dearer. Ie took no notice of Clemmy's taunts, and let her run n, hoping that she would exhaust herself. Yet it was bitter hour. Old trifles, which he had long since forotten, and in which it is to be doubted if he had ever een to blame, were raked up to-night. Miss Clemmy's nger was tearless, but her words were bitter, and her ltimatum was an absolute refusal ever to live under he same roof with a sister-in-law.

'If I marry, you may be sure that I will only bring into this house as its mistress a woman who will be your true sister, and share with me in the care of you. Perhaps, Clemmy, she may even succeed better than seem to have done.

'Do not try to deceive me by saying "if you larry"—your wife will be Marion Ford.'

'Then Marion Ford, in God's name, let it be.' and with those words the minister left the room.

For half an hour after he left her Miss Esslemont's ries and screams filled the house, for she had gone ff into strong hysterics, and would probably remain or the next forty-eight hours incapable of any VOL. II. L

exertion, or even of bearing the daylight in her room.

Alone in his study the Rev. George Esslemont paced up and down. What was he to do? Woo Marion, and perhaps win her, only to make her life a burden to her? or harden his heart, and turn Clementina out of the house, as soon as he was engaged to be married?

Of course he might do that, for the tie of brother and sister is not like that of husband and wife. He had already sacrificed wellnigh twenty years of life to this task of being Clemmy's keeper. There was no imperative call on him to go on with a duty that had come to him when he was young. That he was no longer. He had grown grey, and the world had grown dark; and only Marion was like a lighthouse, that sheds at intervals its rays upon the darkness and the wild heavings of the sea.

Was he bound to go on wasting his life still further, throwing a good and a useful existence at the feet of a creature incapable of using or appreciating the devotion he showed her, though she profited by the many sacrifices he had made? Clementina had no

legal claim on him for anything, unless for food and lodging. Ah! but is not faithfulness a thing that binds with stronger ties than legal claims? Was he not bound by his own past of goodness and fidelity? or might he cast off this intolerable burden, and turn from this half-crazy and wholly ungrateful dependent to the sober certainty of mutual trust, to the sweet yoke of love—in a word, to Marion?

He put up his hands before his face. At what a pace did his pulses beat if only in fancy he held that little hand in his! Had he no choice but to make Marion wretched, or to give up thinking of her?

Give up! What then? No wife; no young, sweet lips returning his kiss; no fair head on his pillow; no light, girlish step on the nursery stairs: but only this continued, grinding solitude; and then, at the end, the chill friendship of Death.

And had Clementina ever given up anything for him? Was this to be called living?—all joy and sympathy kept out; all misery, discord, and disorder kept in? Did not Clemmy often complain, and say that she was not well cared for in his house?—that she hated the coast, and would be quite well if only she

could get away from the sound of the sea? Was she not a prisoner here, and he her keeper? Were her fits of silence and sullenness, her fits of gaiety, her hysterics, and nervous nights and nerveless mornings, were these to be now and for evermore, as they had been for twenty years, the sole occupations of his life? Ah! bitter thoughts, whence do you come to-night? Ah! little, cold hands chafed by him so often when the fires of life burned low! Ah! pale mouth, that had lost its colour from pain; and low voice that had lost its tune from sorrow! 'Shame on you, George Esslemont, to grudge her the years you have given her!' And then the minister fell on his knees, and there alone in the darkness he wrestled with that evil sense of his own losses that would harden his heart against another's needs.

'Oh, God! who, if known to men at all, art known as pity, keep me pitiful, and keep me true.'

Absorbed in this struggle, the minister was not aware that at this moment the door of his study had been gently opened by Robby, who had come in search of some arsenic-paste kept in his master's bureau. The room was dark, and Robby was not 2

tartled to hear a groan coming, as it were, from or. The servant had no light, but by the glow dying embers he could, after a minute or two, we some white object on the sofa that seemed and fall in a way that was unaccountable. stood perfectly still; and what was his dismay ern that that moaning voice was his master's! ned itself from sighs at last into words.

o foolish am I and ignorant, that I am even as a pefore Thee; yet despise not Thou the work of own hands. God of the spirits of all flesh, give souls and bodies Thou hast made, the things of they have need. Turn Thou the light of Thy enance upon us, and make us glad. Oh! Father, eeth in secret, forgive. Help! for the waters me in unto my soul. I am weary because of eatness of the way, because of the hunger of soul, and spirit for loving warmth, and for

Yet Thy will be done, great God of my by God, and her God, our God; Thy will be

bby drew his hand across his eyes; and when the closed the door after him he said to him-

self, 'What has the Judas-like crayter been doing to him noo?'

Long after he was gone the minister's hands continued clasped upon the little sofa, until, worn out by the conflict, he dropped suddenly asleep on the floor.

CHAPTER IX. HUGH.

'Oh! does not a meeting like this make amends

For all the long years I've been wandering away?'

MOORE—

CHAPTER IX.

r was under these fortunate auspices that Marion arted on her long and solitary journey. Full of ncertainty about her brother, and as to his reception y her father, should she succeed in bringing him ome with her, she was also aware of a great sense rest from the hour spent under Mr. Esslemont's ire. Was it that, tired by the struggle of life, she ud begun to long for protection and rest; or was ere another, and an even deeper, cause for her Ppiness? Little able as she might be to give an count of it to herself, it is certain that as the train rried on through the darkness, a singular work int on in her mind. The feeling seemed all new d wonderful to her. It was as if the design, preusly traced on a plate by the hand of an etcher, s only now beginning to develop its brilliant its and the transparent depths of its shadows. It is always thus. There is a something that is begun by the hand of the lover, but which is left to be developed in the heart by the woman who is loved; and whereas the hues of passion change and fade and pale, these, the lines of tenderness, sober, grave, and true, cannot but deepen and endure.

So preoccupied was Marion that she did not during the journey notice greatly either her travelling companions, or the lapse of the hours. Only towards morning she fell asleep; and if the angels who guard us looked into her slumbering brain they must surely have pardoned, even while they read it, the girl's one short and tender dream.

The next day broke grey and foggy, with every promise of rain; but Marion, when she reached Liverpool, got a cab and drove at once to the Docks. There she learned that the 'Caledonia' was in the Mersey, and would be up by half-past two. She got some breakfast, and vainly tried to rest for some hours; and then, though feeling stunned and lost among all the traffic and business of the place, she returned to the landing-dock, there to wait, with beating heart, for the arrival of the great steam

1 the river and on the shore the bustle was wonrful, and she felt like a drop in a bucket; in fact, nervous and lonely that once or twice she was mpted to regret both her journey and her (as she w called it) crazy determination to find out Hugh. aly the memory of their mother's love for him kept her courage till the first sight of the vessel changed e current of her thoughts, and gave her an agonising ead lest it might now please God to disappoint her d this good hope, as He had done many a time in e last year of Mrs. Ford's life. She was thankful at Hugh's arrival was not to take place at night, it that she might have the benefit of such daylight a drizzling February day had to give. She still oped to recognise, or be recognised by, her brother. When the 'Caledonia' had been made fast, and le crowd of passengers at last began to press towards e gangway, Marion placed herself as near it as she uld, wrapped her shawl tightly over her chest, and od, without an umbrella, in the close, fast-falling

What a mob of people! of all ages, sizes, and en colours! and how they struggled! At length

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she caught sight of a face that answered her expectations, for it had grey eyes, a full red mouth, and soft, straight, brown hair, under a round cap.

Only the man in question looked curiously old to be Hugh; and this man, if Hugh he were, carried an infant. There must be some mistake! Yet there were Mrs. Ford's eyes. Finally the man turned and said something to a young woman close behind him, and now the likeness was beyond all doubt. It was, it must be, Hugh!

Marion rushed forward and reached the corner of the gangway. 'Hughie!' she cried. 'Hughie!' There came such a startled look into the traveller's eyes!

'Do take care of the child!' cried a voice, before he could do more than give that one mild glance round.

'Hughie!' Marion called again. And now the brother and sister were actually side by side in the crowd. But the mob of passengers pushed them all forward. Hugh, carrying the child, was the first, then Marion, and then the young woman. 'Hughie,' she said, this time more softly, but with such a deep thrill of anxiety in her voice. 'Marion! Can it be

Keep by us,' was all there was time to say, till st the crowd surged away to the right of them, and his little group, so strange to each other, and yet early related, standing face to face.

Vith a sob Marion threw herself on her brother's . 'Is it your child, Hugh?' she at last found ls to say. 'Is it your child? Oh! if mother I but have lived to see this day!'

Then she is gone! Too surely I might have vn she must be gone,' murmured Hugh; then, cting himself, he said, 'This is my wife: this is ie Clarke, whom I married fourteen months ago ew York.'

The two women shook hands, and then looked at other. How long they might have done so in ce is uncertain, but just then the baby began to and to show by his screams his sense of the that was falling upon him. The young mother ed that they might at once get under shelter, a move was made in the direction of the inn e Marion said that she had breakfasted that ing.

Vhile the baby occupied its mother, Hugh and

his sister took counsel together. 'Oh! why did you never write?'

'You may well ask me that. My life has been a heavy one with the sin of that unwritten letter on my conscience. George Watson wanted me to write it from Lerwick.'

'He told me that.'

'It was true. It was no fault of his. No one was to blame but myself. I did not write it; and then, when I had taken service on board a strange ship, I dared not. Yet I knew that I was breaking her heart. It was the most miserable year of my life.' And Hugh burst into tears.

Oh! the dead! oh! the dead! that do not come back, and that we cannot see again, and at whose feet we cannot fall when we would fain ask them to forgive!

'Yet I did love her, May; I did love her dearly,' he added, after a sorrowful pause; and after another Marion whispered:

'It may be that where she is she knows that now; but, oh! while she was here it was hard, hard for her to bear.'

^{&#}x27;When was it?'

'In the next spring—in March; at half-past nine ne night.'

'If she had been alone with you I would have entured that letter from Lerwick; but there was my ther. He had struck me, and I could not get over lat; it might be what Uncle James called our lighland pride, but I could not get over that; and had taken some of father's money, and just believe he ought to have given me some; so he was ire not to be able to get over that, and no letter ould do any good.'

'Ah! to mother it would have done all the good the world. Hughie, Hughie, nobody knows what a ord in time may do.'

'But nobody thanks you for it when it comes too te; and after I had enlisted on board the "Brookn" I dared not write, even to mother. I did not link she could overlook my going to America, so, lough I wrote many a letter, I never dared to send ne. Every one of them went into the fire: and she ent into her grave!'

Marion put her arms round her brother, and kissed im,

'You have not told me yet, May, how you managed to find me here.'

'I read by chance, in the Dundee paper, that you were to attend the meeting of a society, and that you were to come to Liverpool by the "Caledonia," as to-day. It was at half-past one that I read it, and the train leaves at 4.20. First I had to get a sort of leave out of father. He had a stroke eighteen months ago, and as he is in a feeble state I was not quite clear in my own mind if I could leave him, for he was terribly upset.'

'Will he see me?'

'I am sure he will come to it, even if at first he should be still a little stiff; and Mr. Esslemont happromised me to bring him round while I am away. He was very happy, Hugh, to think that you were alive and prospering. He lent me money for my journey, for we had not as much in the house a would pay for my tickets.'

'I hope he is all right.'

'Yes,' replied Marion.

The reply was in one syllable, yet that one syllable had cost her a blush. Hugh did not notice

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- , however, and he went on: 'Is the old place much hanged?'
 - 'Not much. Christy is gone away.'
 - 'I shan't miss her.'
- 'She left when Robby Tosh married Peggy sutchart. Tom Skinner manages the farm, for father an do but little now, and the gig is sold. Miss lementina is alive, and just the same; and the Vilkies are all well.'
- 'I am glad of that. Would not I like to be in the 'Nellie" again! Tell me, is the old Doctor still to he fore?'
- 'He is; both he and his wife hang on wonderully. Maggie Brodie has a child. But, Hugh, what ave you, and your wife, called your boy?'
 - 'Kenneth James.'
- 'I am so glad you have named it after father! and I am sure that he will take to his "oe."'

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CHAPTER X.

KENNETH SENIOR AND KENNETH JUNIOR.

'A child, more than all other gifts

That earth can offer to declining man,

Brings hope with it, and forward-looking thoughts.'

WORDSWORTH.

CHAPTER X.

THE conviction that her small nephew would prove the best of peacemakers led Marion not only to return at once to Netherbyres, but induced her to appear there accompanied by Mrs. Ford and the child, persons to whom not only the newspaper had not alluded, but of whose existence she had herself two days ago not so much as even dreamed.

It was strange to think of Hugh as the head of a family, but so it was. Annie Ford was disposed to be friendly, and she at once consented to go down to Scotland with Marion. Hugh, of course, must remain in Liverpool for the meeting of the Photographic Society, and there would be plenty of time for the women to communicate with him as to the state of his father's feelings towards him. From the fact that he had married a pretty, young woman with some money, and that his child was named 'Kenneth,'

Marion encouraged him to hope great things. Then there were also Mr. Esslemont's good offices to be relied on. These afforded, to Marion at least, a secret source of confidence and serenity. There was no doubt about it that, even in these moments of interest and excitement, Mr. Esslemont's sympathy seemed to her to outweigh every other pleasure. In fact, so varied is human life, and so variable is human nature. that whereas at the day of Hugh's flight, now almost four years ago, her brother had occupied the whole space in her mind, now, in this the week of his happy return, he only seemed to occupy, as it were, the middle distance; while in the foreground she saw always that pale, grave face and those kind eyes that seemed to say more to her than anything else in the world.

In a place like Lumgair intelligence soon spreads, and in a very few hours Mr. Esslemont heard the news from Netherbyres, viz., the appearance of Hugh Ford's American wife (wi'siller) and of a 'wee laddie,' who bore the old farmer's name.

To see these wonders, to see Marion, and to hear from her own lips all that concerned her meeting with her brother, Mr. Esslemont lost no time in hastening to Netherbyres.

Robby Tosh drove him thither, and as his master alighted, an indescribable something that spread over his master's face and figure, caught the faithful servant's attention. The door was quickly opened, and Mr. Esslemont passed into the house at once; but Robby watched him as he disappeared. 'Weel, he is no so young as he was, and women-folk are fashious and foolish craiters; but, gin I were one o' them, I would like weel to be the lass that he is going to meet wi' you look in his face.'

The girl in question formed, when the minister entered, one of an admiring group gathered round young Mrs. Ford and her child.

The presence of Kenneth Ford in his big chair already told favourably for the state of family affairs. Close beside him sat Mistress Annie Ford with her infant, and Mrs. Connacher, of the Mill Inn; with Dr. and Mrs. Miller, and Marion, as admirers.

When Marion's eyes met Mr. Esslemont's their lids fell at once; but she smiled, and held out a hand, which he took, and also held for a moment.

'Well, how has it been? How was it at Liverpool?'

'Wonderful! Far better even than we thought it could be.' And now the eyes, a moment ago so shy, were lifted trustingly to his. 'Hugh knew me the instant I spoke. He remains in Liverpool for ten days; but you see that father has taken to the child at once. I am so thankful!'

'So am I.' And then Mr. Esslemont went over and sat by the farmer, and began his acquaintance with young Mrs. Ford, about whom nothing could for the present be said with certainty, except that she was thin and slight, had pretty eyes, and spoke with a strong American accent. She told Mr. Esslemont that she had married Hugh in New York, fourteen months ago, and that she had two sisters there, one of whom lived with their father, who was an auctioneer, and one was married to an artist. It had been originally intended to leave the baby in that sister's care. 'But I am glad now that we changed our minds, for I should have missed him, and he is more thought of here than anything else in the house.'

The young mother laughed as she said this; and

Iarion, laughing also, crossed over, and stood by her ew sister. As she played with the child it is posble that Robby, could he have watched the group, light have also found something to say as to the sture bliss of the man into whose eyes Marion looked p every now and again with that softly pleasing nile.

In truth these were halycon days at Lumgair. An mount of intercourse went on, in honour of the new-omers, such as had not existed since poor Mrs. Ford's leath; and to the minister's eyes Marion appeared in always more attractive shapes.

Only Hugh had yet to come.

When he arrived his sister met him at the station; id though she was able to tell him that their father as unusually well, and that his child already ruled e house, she saw that his heart was full, and that eir meeting would be a nervous moment.

It was very quiet. No direct words of welcome, of apology, were spoken on either side; the farmer intented himself with remarking that it was a very et day, and that as the roads were 'thât soft' his in had better 'change his feet' before he dined.

The spell of reserve was, however, soon broken by little Kenneth, who, while Marion kissed his little, fat, pink toes, fastened both his hands in her hair, and pulled it all about her eyes in a sunny disorder.

Then came Marion's turn to have her brother to herself.

She took him up stairs and showed him the little attic where he used to work, and the one in which he formerly slept. In their mother's empty room the brother and sister sat down and looked at each other. 'No, Hughie, you are not much changed,' the girl exclaimed as, with her head a little on one side, she completed her survey of him.

'Well, you are, May,' was the reply, and it was true. The years that had passed over Marion had changed her in every way. In stature she was still diminutive, but her figure was rounder; there was nothing sallow about the paleness of her well-proportioned cheek, and her manner, without loss of simplicity, now expressed a good deal of her earnest character.

Next day the brother and sister went down to the Fisherton. How Hugh rejoiced in the lapping of the

ea on the familiar and well-loved pier, in the children rho waded and played, and hunted crabs among the ough crevices of the dulse-covered crags; in these Larch mornings, in his competence, his liberty, and is home! He told Mr. Esslemont, when he went to he Manse, that he was the happiest man in Scotand; and Marion, who was of the party, told him that he had often to ask herself if she was not dreaming. I cannot believe that at Netherbyres there really ve my brother and sister, and, most wonderful of all, hat there is a child. You know that in the time of he Meldrums, the house of Netherbyres was said to lave a curse on it, because the laird, Patrick Meldrum. who built it, bridled the water-horse, and made him drag stones for the walls. But I am sure the curse is gone now that wee Kenny has come.'

'How happy you must be with them all!'

'Yes,' replied Marion, 'and father hopes you will come, and take your dinner with us on Tuesday.'

'I would gladly, but I am unfortunately obliged to attend a meeting in Edinburgh. It is not on business of my own,' he added, seeing that the faces of the three young Fords fell, 'but there is some rather

important evidence to be collected in the case of a friend which will come up before the Assembly in May. I may be of use to him, so I must leave home on Monday: to be absent for a week at the least; but after that, Hughie, I hope to see a great deal of your work and experiments.'

- 'The more the better, sir,' replied Hugh.
- 'The more you come the more we shall all enjoy ourselves,' chimed in his wife.
- 'I am not sure, however, that it is a very good plan. I have begun to think that it is not. It makes me feel the horrible loneliness here more.' And the minister glanced at Marion, who stood a little further from him than the young couple.

No one had ever heard him utter a complair before, but to-day something wrung these words from him, and his eyes looked wistfully after the gias he saw the little party leave the garden of the Manse.

CHAPTER XI.

THE WANDERER.

'Here awa, there awa, Wandering Willie; Here awa, there awa, haud awa hame.'

Scotch Song.

CHAPTER XI.

THE Manse of Lumgair looked more quiet and solitary than ever when Mr. Esslemont had started for Edinburgh, and had left his sister to the care of Eppy. Poor lady! she fancied that the reverse of this arrangement was the case, and that the onerous charge, not to say of the good Eppy, but of the house and glebe, had all devolved upon her shoulders.

In these last days of May the spring had not yet made any great progress, and the long, light evenings were chilly. Miss Clementina had a fire in the Parlour, though she sat near the window, and made wax flowers at a small table. This pursuit was the one which gave her the most pleasure, and her delicate fingers were now busy with a spray of cherry-blossom. She worked quietly, and seemed to have lost a good deal of the agitation of the last fortnight; but it was with fear and disapprobation that, about

"Here Iwa, there Iwa, Wantering Wille:

Here Iwa, there Iwa, hand Iwa hame."

South Sug-

CHAPTER X

E Mianse of Lumpset worker more questions sothat ever weer his Essention; say market for niburgit and mad seit in sesser in the start of W. Foor more see instant the the revenue of arrangement was the saw, and the law sucronthe not to say of the good epp; but of fact many PICOL DEL A. MEVONEL MOST ME MONIMENT. In these as way, of heavier spring his no ye

le am grez: program, and for met, ago: surroug:



6 P.M. on this the evening of her fourth day of solitude, she overheard Eppy in prolonged colloquy with some beggar, or stranger, at the gate. She remembered with terror that Robby Tosh was absent. He had been sent a week before to the Infirmary at Easterhaven to be treated for an injury to his hand.

The stranger might be only Jenny Mowat, from the Fisherton, who was wont to charge so exorbitantly for crabs, and thus to stimulate Eppy's faculties pleasantly now and again by a wrangle over fourpence. Only the hour was too late for Jenny. It might also be Rab Duncan, the pedlar, in which case no dangers were at hand, for Rab was quiet and canty, and at the worst would ask Eppy if he had no chance of selling a wedding-ring to her sweetheart, or if she meant to save up her money till she needed to buy his best spectacles; to all of which Eppy would reply, 'Gi' wâ wi' ye! I am nane of thae that thinks a man perfect salvation,' and then laugh so heartily that Rab knew he might repeat the joke next time he came his rounds: which of course he never failed to do.

Miss Esslemont hoped it might be Rab. True

o her superstition never to look at things that beonged to another person, lest she might cast an evil
pell or influence among them, she never inspected
lab's pack, but she would always hear from Eppy
hat was in it, and then, through Eppy, make some
ttle purchases. But, no, this stranger was not Rab,
or the maid was now vehement in assuring him (whover he might be) that the minister was from home.
Then Clementina got uneasy, for the neighbourhood
of a great city like Easterhaven gained for Lumgair
numerous visits of tramps and impostors.

Being a woman naturally born to fears, the first hing that Miss Esslemont did was to shut the win-low, and the next was to go into the passage, and all, 'Eppy! Eppy! send him away.'

Too plainly the stranger was of the male sort, and had a gruff, husky voice, as of a person not quite ober.

'Ye may say that, mem, but ye will hae to sort be gaberlunzie yoursel. He says he maun see the linister, and I'm telling him the minister is away to Edinbro'.'

'Ask him what he wants.'

'I hae speered that o' him; but tho' he's a vagabond-looking chield I'm thinking he's a kind o' simple; or else he's been tasting; but he'll no' gang a foot for me.'

What was more, a heavy, uncertain tread on the gravel showed that the tramp in question had followed the maid up to the very door of the Manse. In another moment the open doorway was filled by an apparition that might have easily scared a less nervous mistress, or a less respectable servant than the good Eppy.

Forsaken misery was in this man's figure. Stupid with drinking spirits, all his joints worked out of place. He was in rags, and his trowsers were wom into fringes round the half-trodden-down heels of the boots, through which his stockingless feet were visible. The peak of his slouched cap was bent and broken; his shirt was wide and worn round the neck, where a coarse grey comforter was twisted; a red jacket, that seemed to have been, at some time, part of an undress uniform, was stained and tattered; while his bloodshot eyes were red and glazed, as if he had been looking into a furnace.

'What do you want from the minister?' asked lementina, advancing a few steps. Pity had gained ne day over her terrors; moreover, as the tramp had is back to the light, she saw nothing of him as yet ut the bowed and shabby outline of his figure.

'If the minister of this place is Mr. Esslemont, I ave something to say to him,' was the reply, in hoarse voice. But the words had hardly passed to tramp's lips before Miss Esslemont gave a shrill tream.

'What did you say?' she cried. 'Speak!' And ne lifted up both her hands, as if to keep off some error; while Eppy, aghast at this new exhibition of rangeness in her poor mistress, pulled her by the cirt of the dress.

'Whist! whist! mem. I'll sort him. Come you en.'

'I must see the minister, if he is Mr. Esslemont, s I am told he is,' reiterated the tramp, also in his urn, advancing a couple of steps.

Miss Clemmy, now catching sight of his face, ran orward, and threw herself on his neck.

'Alaistair! Alaistair!' she cried. 'Oh! my poor

one!' And then, fainting, she fell across the open door of the parlour.

'In the Lord's name, man, who are ye?' demanded Eppy, as, stooping over her prostrate mistress, she turned her eyes now on her and now on the ragged tramp who was leaning up against the wall.

'Is that Clementina Esslemont?' he asked at last.

'It's Miss Esslemont. Run you to the white house yonder, and send Mrs. Baxter to me.'

But to run was not in the tramp's power, and this Eppy soon perceived. His gait was too unsteady, and his wits too absent, to carry any message, even as far as to the nearest of the cottages in the Fore Doors, or lane leading from the village street to the Manse.

Luckily Miss Esslemont now opened her eyes.

'Keep him! keep Alaistair!' she moaned feebly.

'Bide, I tell ye,' said Eppy authoritatively to the tramp, at the same time that she eyed him, and his soiled garments, with a mixture of contempt and disgust; and then, with a wave of her hand, she pointed to the little bench under the rowan-tree, that

erved as the resting-place of every waif and stray who came to the Manse, whether on a good errand or on a bad one.

Miss Esslemont's state puzzled her servant comoletely. The tramp being no longer in her sight, she eemed to have lost the clue to the emotion, or terror, which, five minutes before, had been strong enough to deprive her of consciousness. She put up her hand to her head, and said that she felt very sick.

'Come away to your bed, and I will gie you a cup of carvey-tea,' cried Eppy, only too thankful to have a sort of permission to put one at least of her troublesome charges into a safe place. 'Come way, mem.' But as she moved towards the staircase way, mem.' But as she moved towards the staircase with fears lest the tramp should make an attack on the contents of the ground-floor rooms. 'My pity! it will be God's mercy if he does not get off with the spoons,' she ejaculated. 'I cannot put up with more of these ongoings. They put a body past their judgment, and, as sure as ever I have her safe in her bed, I will have Mrs. Miller's advice.'

Eppy acted on this decision.

No sooner was Miss Esslemont disposed of, than the locked all the doors, and, with the keys safe in her pocket, she went out to cross-examine the tramp. He refused to answer any questions, and as he sat making scrawls on the gravel with his stick, Eppy thought that she saw tears on his face. From this she concluded—not erroneously—that he might possibly be sorrowful, and that most certainly he was not sober.

As she went down the lane by the Fore Doors she ran against Marion Ford.

- 'Your legs are younger than mine, Miss Ford,' she said; 'you will step to the Doctor's house, and ask if the Captain will speak a word here.'
- 'What is the matter? Nothing wrong with the minister, I hope?'
- 'He's in Edinbro', honest man, but what is wrang wi' Miss Clementina passes my knowledge.'
 - 'Is Miss Esslemont ill?'
- 'She's to her bed now. But come you here, Miss Ford. If you can redd up this house for me, it's myself will be obliged to you.'

With these words Eppy led the way back to the Manse, unlocked the front door, and showed Marion into the parlour.

'Who is that?' Marion asked, now for the first time noticing the tramp under the rowan-tree.

'That's what I cannot tell; but I'm thinking we must have the Captain up here to speer it o' him.' And then Eppy, in a whisper, and with many amplifications, proceeded to narrate the arrival of the stranger, his demand to see the minister, and his apparent recognition by Miss Esslemont. 'She gied sic an awfu' like skraik, as if she had met the Littlegude himself! and syne she fa's on his neck, and "Alaistair! Alaistair!" cries she.'

'I am sure that the best thing to be done is to get Captain Miller, if he is at home; but I am half-afraid he is not. Mrs. Miller is out. As for Miss Esslemont, one would require to be sure that she is not making some strange mistake.'

'She was just something forbye ordinar' in contrariness before the minister went away. But what gared her faint?'

'Shall I go up and see her, Eppy?'

'I'll be muckle obleeged. It is a kind of strange being left wi' her. This fasherie is waur nor her tantrums.'

When Marion went upstairs and entered Miss Esslemont's room, she sat down by the bed, and said, 'I am sorry to hear that you are not well to-day. I am afraid you have been out in the sun, and have got a headache.'

Miss Esslemont, instead of half-averting her face, or showing any of the signs of restless, suspicious timidity which generally marked her intercourse with strangers, sat up in bed, and, looking Marion full in the face, said, 'You are Marion Ford?'

'I am Marion; and hearing you were ill, I came, as you are alone just now, to ask if I can be of any use to you.'

'Would you take a message to a friend of mine?'

'Certainly, if you will tell me to whom I am to take it.'

'It is to Captain Alaistair Mackenzie, to whom I am engaged to be married.'

'Now,' thought Marion to herself, 'here is the weak

lace in this poor woman's brain. We have always eard it said in the parish that Miss Esslemont was razy, but the minister keeps his secret so well that no ne has ever known more about her madness than hat she will not write her name. Is the man down tairs known to her? is he really Captain Mackenzie? r is it her way to fancy herself engaged to be maried, and that any man she meets is the Captain laistair Mackenzie of her crazy fancies?'

It was very puzzling to know how to answer the oor lady, who, in the meantime, looked imploringly

Marion's face.

- 'Did you not know that I am engaged to him?'
 ne asked.
 - 'I had not heard it.'
- 'I have not seen him for twenty years, and you ever heard about him because my father did not ke him, and sent him away. He went to India, ut he came here to-day to see me. I don't know here he came from, and now I don't know where he gone. Can you find him for me?'

'I will do my best,' was the reply; but 'decidedly,' hought Marion to herself, 'if this happens every time that Miss Clemmy sees a stranger the poor minister must have his hands full. In the meantime we must do our best to pacify her. I can tell her that Hugh and Captain Miller will look out for her friend, and let her know where he is living; and really, if she is not better to-morrow, Eppy must send for Mr. Esslemont. No one else can manage her.'

While these thoughts passed through her mind, Marion held the poor lady's hand. It was very cold, and it trembled.

'Where do think he has gone?' she asked again, with a face of piteous entreaty.

'Explain to me where you last saw your old friend,' asked Marion, doubly perplexed by noticing that Miss Esslemont's manner was certainly not more unlike other people's than in general; on the contrary, her expression was more trustful, and he glance less unsteady.

'I saw him at the front door, but I do not knon how he got here, or why he went away. I cannounderstand it.' And now Miss Esslemont turn every pale, and sank back on her pillow.

'Do you know that your hands are very cold?

Marion. 'I will tell Eppy to get you some tea.' having said this Marion went down stairs. She Eppy to her mistress, then passed out to the of the house, and sat down on the bench beside agged stranger.



CHAPTER XII. ALAISTAIR MACKENZIE.

'Musing full sadly in his sullein mind:

His griesly locks long growen and unbound,
Disordered hong about his shoulders round,
And hid his face, through which his hollow eyne
Looked deadly dull, and staréd as astound.

His garment nought but many ragged clouts.'

Faerie Queen, Book I. 9.

CHAPTER XII.

THE wanderer turned his bloodshot eyes on her, and then said, in a sulky tone, 'I don't know you.'

'No,' replied Marion; 'but, as Miss Esslemont is ill, you must let me know what it is that you want from the minister.'

The man again began to make holes in the gravel with his stick, and then said, in the same sullen tone, 'I am just out of the Infirmary at Easterhaven. A man in the next bed to me told me that Mr. Esslemont lived here. Is this the Manse of Lumgair?'

- 'It is—the man who told you so is a servant in this house, sent to the Infirmary because of a poisoned hand.'
 - 'I must see Mr. Esslemont.'
- 'He is in Edinburgh; but, if you will give me your name and address, a letter will be written to him at once.'

There was another pause, only broken when Marion asked directly, 'What is your name?'

'Alaistair Mackenzie.'

Marion started. 'And what is your address? Where are you stopping?' she added, varying the form of her question, as she saw that the answer was being delayed.

'I have no address. I am a gentleman, but I am in distress. I want a night's lodging, for I am ill.'

What was to be said? This man gave as his name that of the person with whom Miss Clemmy, rightly or wrongly, identified him. Were there, perhaps, two Alaistair Mackenzies? Marion knew enough of the Highlands to know that there might easily be found twenty persons bearing the same name, but Miss Esslemont was surely mistaken in identifying this one with the friend and lover of her youth. But what in the meantime was to be said or done for him in his ragged, homeless state?

'I am very sorry for you if you have known better days,' she began; 'still, in the minister's absence you cannot stay here. His sister is ill.' 'Is she?' was the only reply made by the wanerer. He said it in a dreary tone, and with a voice lat did not tell so much of any feeling as of a dull espair.

'You cannot remain at the Manse. Will you go nd see Captain Miller? He is an officer, who has een in India, but he is at home just now, and living ith his father, old Dr. Miller, in that slated house at 1e lower end of the village street. Could you find our way there? I think you must try, for it is geting late, and, as I told you, Miss Esslemont is ill.'

'Is she?' said the man, without, however, showing ny signs of rising from the bench, or of going to find or. Miller's house and son. The human clay in him was so sodden with alcohol that it was not only very bul and miry clay indeed, but his brain seemed unqual to making more than an occasional and inonsequent effort.

'Do you not wish to have something to eat?' isked Marion. Her companion answered curtly 'No,' and she returned to the house to consult again with Eppy.

The hour was already late, and the man, whoever VOL. II.

he might prove to be, was homeless, and, as far as Marion could judge, very ill.

'One can hear every breath he draws ten yards off,' she said. 'He gives his name as that of the person about whom Miss Esslemont talks, but I do not think that he ought to meet her without her brother's permission. He says that he is a gentleman; and, truth to say, in spite of his rags, he seems to be, or to have been one.'

'Wae's me that his mother's son should be sitting there, and in sic like straits this day!'

'It is a bad business, whatever it is. I must get my brother, and he must settle, with Captain Miller, what can be done with him for the night. In the morning he may be able to give a more clear account of himself. If you don't like being left alone in the house with Miss Esslemont, I will sleep here.'

'I would take it kindly, for we will hae an uncômmon time of, it with her. When once a thing is fast in that head of hers it's a serious job. She is ill to guide at all times.'

Marion carried out her plan. The first person whom she met, as she turned out of the Manse gate,

was Walter Miller, who had just been informed by Mrs. Baxter that Eppy was in trouble, and wanted his help. To him she gave an account of their dilemma, and then went in search of her brother, since Captain Miller at once advised that the stranger should be housed by Hugh, in one of the many spare attics of Netherbyres, there being no room available in the Doctor's house for the purpose.

Thither accordingly the wanderer was led by the two men, who confessed themselves unable to extract anything from him, except that he was newly out of the Infirmary, was a gentleman, and expected the minister of Lumgair to assist him.

After a prolonged consultation at the farm, Marion returned to the Manse, where Miss Esslemont's state remained much as when she saw her last. She begged to have her door left open, because, as she said, 'if anyone passed she should know the step;' but the night-hours brought no steps, and no events.

To Marion they brought no sleep. She was not only anxious and perplexed on Miss Clemmy's account, but the hours spent in the minister's empty room filled her with many emotions.

She was beginning to understand much of what she had never even guessed before of George Esslemont's trials, and of the narrow, difficult life he carried out with energy and untiring devotion. She got up and looked at his books, and when she sat down again she covered her face with her hands and sobbed. It was one of those sudden, causeless passions of tears to which she had been subject of late: one of the birth-throes through which Love is born. The only regrettable thing is that at that moment Mr. Esslemont could not have seen her, seated in his big, dark chair, and with her forehead leaning against the foot of his bed, and the tears running over her soft face, while she sorrowed for his sorrows, and listened with a watchful ear lest his sister stirred or moaned in her sleep.

Marion, with her Celtic love of presentiments and her sense of the romantic fitness of things, tried during that night-watch to convince herself that the stranger could be no other than Miss Esslemont's lover, and she was therefore prepared for the intelligence which Hugh gave her next morning. It was conclusive enough, if far from cheering.

'He is very ill, is he not?'

'He is indeed,' answered Walter, 'and in high fever; and the wandering about in the bitter, east wind of yesterday has brought back the inflammation of the lungs for which he was in hospital. He is beginning to ramble in his talk now, but last night when I first got him to bed, he was clear enough. It is plain that he has been what is called "an officer and a gentleman." I don't know his family, but the 117th was quartered at Lahore when I was there, and he has answered quite correctly the questions I put to him about its commanding officer, and the cantonments which the infantry occupied there.'

'He is really Captain Mackenzie, then?'

'That I can't undertake to answer for; but, if you will allow me, I will tell you all I have picked up from him. You will keep it to yourself, or tell Miss Esslemont, as you think best.'

'I dare not name it to her till the minister comes home.'

'So be it. He told us that his name was Alaistair Mackenzie, of Balintraid, in Ross-shire; that he had been an officer in the 117th Regiment; that when quartered at Fort George he had known the Esslemonts; that the regiment had gone to India, and that its move had prevented the marriage which he hoped to make. He served for ten years in India, having exchanged from the 117th into the Bengal Cavalry. He had no pension, and by the purchase of steps, by debts, and one trouble after another, and by play, he lost his all—"and himself," he added pathetically. All his later attempts in America to better his circumstances turned out sad mistakes, and he returned to Britain.

In London, when his last shilling was spent, he had had recourse to the workhouse. But he was delicate, had an attack of cholera, could not work, and so got a certificate from a doctor that he was unfit for labour. The labour-master nevertheless charged him, before the magistrate, with refusing to perform his task of breaking seven bushels of stones. His hands were bleeding by the time that he did a bushel and a half, and he certainly had not then attempted to do the rest. The magistrate had not sent him to prison. One or two persons had been kind, and he had managed to get a steerage passage

from London to Easterhaven. There, being again penniless and starving, he had gone into the Infirmary for a few days. He was discharged as soon as the attack on his chest was cured; but in the meantime he had learned while there, from a man in the next bed to him, the name of Mr. Esslemont. Further inquiry proved that Mr. Esslemont's Manse was within a few miles of Easterhaven, and he had therefore walked, or rather crawled, to the door of the only person with whose name he was acquainted, and to whom he could make known his tale of utter and homeless distress.

- 'Poor fellow!' said Hugh, 'I think he is about as ill as he can be, and I doubt if he will trouble anyone long.'
 - 'You think him very ill?' said Marion.
- 'Indeed I do; and I am glad I telegraphed at once for Mr. Esslemont. No one can take the responsibility of acting for him.'
- 'There is nothing else to be done,' said Hugh, who, with his hands in his pocket, was taking rather an unfavourable view of the prospect of a fatal illness in the house.

'Your sister is the kindest girl I ever saw,' said Captain Miller, after Marion had left them to return to the Manse, where at intervals through that day and evening Clemmy spoke a great deal of the past. How much of what she said was real or imaginary Marion had no means of guessing; what is certain is that as the minister of Lumgair made his hurried anxious journey home, the woman whom he loved was hourly learning to love and to admire him more.

They met in the garden at Netherbyres, the minister being then on his way to the sick-bed of the wanderer who had come to claim his care.

'I find him taken out of my care, and under yours,' he said to Marion; 'and how can I thank you enough for all you have done for my sister? I know from Eppy that you have spent two nights in my house.'

Marion, colouring, answered gently, 'I hope there is yet a great deal for Hughie and me to do for you.'

'You will let me see you again?' he asked.

'You will find me in the garden, unless my father calls for me,' she replied; and then the minister mounted to the attic, and there found the young Indian officer installed as nurse, beside a delirious and fast-dying man.

'You are invaluable,' said the minister to Walter Miller; and so in truth he was, for, in spite of Marion's best efforts to keep them ignorant of much that passed, Kenneth Ford had become both sulky and frightened at the presence of sickness in his house; while young Mrs. Ford was frightened by the moanings and delirium of a creature who seemed to be suffering all that mind and body can endure.



CHAPTER XIII. BRINGING THE OUTCAST HOME.

- 'Rabbi Meir called upon him. "Oh! return, return unto thy God," entreated the Rabbi.
- "What!" exclaimed Elisha. "Return? Could He receive my penitence: the penitence of one who has so rebelled against Him?"
- "Is it not written," said the Rabbi, "Thou turnest men to contrition? No matter how the soul of man may be crushed, he can still turn to his God."—Rabbinical Tale from the 'Mishna.'

CHAPTER XIII.

'THERE is only one thing certain,' said Hugh to his father, 'and that is, it can't last long. There has been recent inflammation of the lungs, and there is dropsy now.'

'From many attacks of pericarditis,' added Walter Miller.

'Hoot! Paraphrases, did ye say? It'll be a new name for deeth,' grunted the farmer; 'that's the only kind of phrase I see aboot it; forbye those that the doctor makes for no being able to cure a body. He is but brittle bail at the best o' times, and he does not cure me, I can tell you.'

Walter could hardly help smiling, but his smile died away when he noticed from the window Mr. Esslemont in earnest consultation with Marion and Mrs. Ford. Marion was speaking; and the minister,

looking at her, had his eyes full of tears. He was bareheaded, and very pale.

- 'Surely we ought to tell her; she ought to see him at any time that his mind is clear.'
- 'I believe you are right. But how will she bear it?'
- 'Better than she will the pain of disappointment. You know'—and here Marion looked timidly in his face, and then coloured—'you know that I did not see her much before this happened, but I do think it has made her less strange, instead of more so. At least, she is less strange with me.'

'God bless you: and God grant that it be so. I will go and bring her. May I ask you to be with her? She ought to have a woman with her. Perhaps all along, if she had had that, it might——'And the minister finished his sentence to himself, as he walked away to break the news to his sister that Alaistair Mackenzie was found.

He told her that, at her particular request, a search had been made for Captain Mackenzie, and Clementina received this intelligence without surprise.

'He was known to be in the neighbourhood.'

'Ah! yes, waiting for me. My poor dear!' And she shook her head.

'But it is now you who must go to him. He is paying a visit to Hugh Ford, who has found him for you; but he is very ill.'

'Ah! I was sure he must have been ill; but I will go to him now.' And Miss Esslemont dressed herself as if for church, and drew on a new pair of gloves; and then, taking her brother's arm, she walked up to Netherbyres.

At the foot of the stairs Marion met her.

It was a terribly haggard face that lay on the pillow in that little attic room; but at the sight of it Clemmy did not start, she only turned pale, as if jarred by a shock. Yet it was strange to see the timid grace, as well as the tenderness, with which Miss Esslemont gave her hand to her wanderer. 'I knew you quite well,' she said gently. 'I knew you at once. I suppose you went away because you did not find my brother, as you expected: and you knew it made my father angry when we met alone?'

Tears rolled over Alaistair Mackenzie's face, though, he did not utter one syllable. It had been difficult to explain to him what was Miss Esslemont's present state, though Walter Miller had, on his part, done his best to prepare the dying man for this interview.

Clementina, when the first timidity was over, sat down in the chair which her brother placed for her; and there was a silence in the room, only broken by a convulsive, groaning sob from Alaistair.

'My poor one!' said Clementina, 'you should not weep. You have been long away, but——'

'Long away! Oh! my God!' And Alaistair tossed himself across the bed, and hid his face near the place where Clementina's thin hand rested.

'You are very ill!' she said, softly.

Mr. Esslemont replaced the pillow.

'I have no right to complain. I have walked in crooked paths since I was a lad. I have lost myself. God be merciful to me!' he added, with a groan, looking piteously in Mr. Esslemont's eyes.

'God be merciful unto you, and bless you,' was the minister's reply.

Alaistair burst into tears. 'Can He bless me?' he cried; and the man seemed overwhelmed under

the just burden of his guilt, and devoured by the just fires of his remorse.

To Mr. Esslemont's astonishment Clementina rose up and said, 'We love you, and we are not better than God. He is the best.' And then the minister passed out of the room, and left the human Love to interpret the Divine.

What passed between them on that, and on the four following days, no one ever knew, or what revelations they may have made to each other of the long night of their sad and divided lives. Clementina's, which had been as a nightmare-haunted sleep, had possibly left few, if any, traces upon her memory; and Alaistair, in the last stages of weakness, could not have told her much of his past. But he who had come to Lumgair, brutalised by want and vice, had, among the cleansing fires of repentance, now wakened from his almost animal-like want of moral sense. In these hours of agony and danger the dark past had become, as it were, incarnate, and his wretched self, as in the likeness of a man whom he had ruined and murdered, confronted him, and pursued him.

'Is he dying a pardoned Christian man, sir?' asked Robby Tosh, who, on his reappearance at the Manse, was amazed to find that he had been the means of sending to Lumgair so strange a visitor'I mind on the poor chap. He was in the neist be to mysel', and a dour chap he was, and full o' pride wi' all his rags. He never telt me his name, nor more than that he was a sodger, and going to Aberdeen, and the North. When I said I was the minister's man at Lumgair, he asked your name, and I had no need to be ashamed o' that. But he never let on a word. Is he a pardoned man, do ye think, sir? There were all kind o' beesties, ye ken, in the veesion o' Peter,' added Robby apologetically.

'He is truly repentant, Robby, and meekly accepts, along with the blessing of God's pardon, the punishments of ruin and early death which he has brought upon himself. When men have rejected the Divine which condescends to "dwell among us," they straightway go into bondage under another master.'

'Aye, and what does he gie them? Nae privilege o' honour, or long life, or wiselike hewing out o' the image o' holiness in their souls, but plenty of hard bondage.'

'And the end of the thing is death. But God be praised that, under His mercy, this poor man has both found and brought a blessing among us.'

Mr. Esslemont was right. The prophecy of the great Edinburgh physician about Miss Esslemont had come true. From the stir of some lost pulse of feeling she had recovered, if not her mental capacity, at least her sanity. The terrible circle of insane fancies and egoisms inside of which she had lived for so long, seemed to be broken.

After her first interview with Alaistair Mackenzie she fainted, and then lay for half an hour quite passive. Marion hung over her, while her brother held her hand, and watched the tears that rolled slowly over her wan face. His own looked to Marion extraordinarily pathetic; and no wonder: for the mingled emotions of the day were almost beyond his endurance. He had trembled for his sister, agonised in prayer for the soiled and sinful soul of the outcast, and was all the time aware of the supremacy which Marion held over his own spirit.

Nothing but the solemn preoccupations of these hours, and the constant presence of others, prevented him from telling her with what an absorbing passion he loved her. And, if she appeared charming to him at all times, what was she now, with her courage, her soft pathos, and with the divine rays of sympathy and holiness lighting up her face? Once, indeed, their eyes met, and she saw that his were suffused with tears. Being the last person in the world to suppose herself adored, Marion misread their cause, and attributed them only to the sad scenes enacted in the little, upper chamber; but Walter Miller, who was present, also saw that glance, and he put his own construction on the emotion of the minister of Lumgair.

Though the present circumstances were such as to try a woman more experienced, and a nerve more firm than that of this gentle and beautiful girl, she was always present, and always quiet, while her vigilant tenderness kept others calm. What of power as well as of beauty, of courage, as well as of purity and goodness, lay under that quiet exterior, and in the depths of those sweet eyes, only Mr. Esslemont had

ever guessed before. Even now he marvelled at her, as men wonder at that Oriental gem which carries a star formed in its heart. Beautiful already by its colour, we hold it as priceless because of this secret of perfect symmetry underlying its pure and crystalline blue.

Clementina, through all the next day and the next, watched by the dying Alaistair. Her hand wiped the damp from his forehead, and her hand gave him the food which Marion prepared; while at intervals her voice might be heard reading to him alternately the Psalms of penitence, and the Evangels of life and hope. Mr. Esslemont watched his sister with amazement. She was perfectly gentle, reasonable, and obedient; she carried out any order with scrupulous attention, and seemed to have no other strength but that of her affections, and of those religious consolations with which she sought to inspire Alaistair.

On the afternoon of the sixth day after Clementina had been brought to the farm, the faces of Alaistair's watchers told plainly that he was departing.

In the room were only Mr. Esslemont, Marion,

and Clementina. Walter had just left them, after giving the dying man some wine, which Alaistair had done little more than touch with his lips. Then Walter, either ignorant of Clementina's resolution never to touch wine, or else forgetful of it, said to her, 'Miss Esslemont, you ought to take what remains of that wine. You went as white as the pillow just now.'

To Mr. Esslemont's amazement Clementina took—the glass in her hand, and after saying, 'Thank yoù ; you are very mindful of everyone,' she handed it back empty to Walter Miller, who then went out.

Perhaps thanks to the wine, Clementina's strength lasted through all the afternoon, though she spent it mainly on her knees beside the bed. Opposite her, on its other side, was Marion.

Alaistair moaned feebly, and Mr. Esslemont passed his arm under the dying head, so as to support it against his own shoulder. He whispered to Alaistair, 'I know that my Redeemer liveth;' and Clementina, hearing the words, clasped her hands in a sort of ecstasy.

'Ah! dear one!' she cried, 'believe, and see how good God is, for His compassions fail not.'

Marion with tearful eyes looked from the one to the other—from the eloquent, loving face of the fragile, white-haired woman to the filmy eyes of her wanderer.

'Ah, Clemmy!' she said, 'I fear he cannot hear you now.'

Clementina started, and looked at Marion wildly; then, as if recollecting herself, she asked her brother for a pencil, and wrote on a slip of paper left lying by the Doctor, a few unsteady words. They were this sentence: 'God is Love'; and they were the first words that her hand had traced since the day when, at her father's command, she had signed that withdrawal of her trothplight. Folding the slip of paper lengthways, she laid it in one of the clammy hands, of which the fingers were already beginning to close over the thumb, and then after holding it for a moment in silence she turned to her brother, and said, 'When he wakes up and reads it, he will understand it, will he not?'

Marion alone had voice enough through her tears to answer 'Yes.'

Clementina, still on her knees, remained like one in a trance.

A few minutes later the gentle pressure of her brother's hand obliged her to stoop her head till it touched the bedclothes. Marion's vigilant tenderness was then on the watch to obey some whispered order of his, and when Clementina was again allowed to raise her eyes, the sheet had been drawn over a dead man's face.

Miss Esslemont tottered to her feet, and fell intoher brother's arms, who led her softly home.

Two days later Marion and Annie Ford wenter down to the Manse to inquire for her.

'This is an altered hoose, and ye will ken an awfûl like odds on her, puir body!' said Robby, who met them at the door. 'She's that quiet and wise-like it canna last long. These are among the maist wonderfu' works o' God,' he added reverently.

At that moment Mr. Esslemont joined them. Clementina, he said, would see them, but not to-day—not till after the funeral. 'How can I thank you enough,' he said to Marion, 'for all that you have done for her?'

'Oh! it was nothing,' replied the girl, averting her eyes. 'I would do as much for anybody that I could help.' The words sounded chilling, though they were not intended to be so by the speaker, whose heart was very full.

'You have done a great deal, and a great blessing has followed, and will still follow on your influence.'

'Oh, no; it was nothing, I assure you; but I should always like to help'—you, Marion was going to have said, but she discreetly altered it to—'her, if I knew how.'

'Some day you must let me tell you.'

'Surely: if only I can understand.' And Marion's eyes looked dreamy, for her thoughts were wandering back through the long years of Miss Esslemont's insanity, and of her brother's trial.

'Understand!' he cried. 'Surely, dear Marion, between people who have known each other so long, and where, besides a long friendship, there is perfect trust, there can be no misunderstandings. Can there be need even for many words?' He noticed that on hearing her own name, Marion had taken two steps forward, so as to conceal her face from him, but not in

it. The great, brown eyes had opened as if with surprise. He added, in a lower voice, 'There is so much that you do not, and that you cannot know; will you give me leave to tell it to you?'

Marion turned half-round towards him, yet he had difficulty in catching her whispered 'Surely.'

Her voice was very low, and he was startled to see the expression of deep pain that she wore, as she walked slowly down the garden-path after Mrs. Ford.

Had she understood him? No, surely not. Had he been, on the other hand, too hasty? It was the very thing he had promised himself not to be—not to hurry her, or frighten her, and so drive out of her heart the rising love which he believed existed there for him. It is the light and heat of the day that daily devour the dewy tears and all the fragrance of the dawn.

Marion did not speak to her sister-in-law all the way home. Was she a fool to suppose herself beloved, and had Mr. Esslemont perhaps nothing to tell her except the sad details of the tragedy of Clemen-

na's love and madness? Or did he love her? And as this thing which had come to her, neither symathy nor friendship, but that Love of which Katie ad said that it was a 'terrible thing'—a thing hich had once before brought her passing happiness, and pains hardly yet effaced?

When was she likely to meet Mr. Esslemont gain? And what would he say or do next?

CHAPTER XIV. WHAT HAPPENED NEXT.

'He wanted a wife his braw house to keep; But favour wi' wooing is fashious to seek.'

The Laird of Cockpen.

'O, what a world of vile, ill-flavoured faults,

Looks handsome on three hundred pounds a year!'

Old Plav.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE illness and death of Alaistair Mackenzie naturally furnished a nine days' wonder for the parish of Lumgair, and no churchgoer failed on Sunday to inspect the new-made grave which was the Wanderer's last resting-place.

The Fords, who had enjoyed, thanks to this episode, a great amount of notoriety, felt as people do when a storm is over. The old farmer breathed freely, young Mrs. Ford slept tranquilly, Marion felt as if her occupation was gone, and Hugh commenced his preparations for turning the attics into workrooms for himself.

He had acquired a small fortune with his American wife, and had left her country with every intention of returning to it; but he now saw that in his father's eyes this would be the greatest offence possible. To remove little Kenneth from Netherbyres would be a crime never to be forgiven, so he began to turn his thoughts towards investments, and work in Easterhaven.

His old friend Howden was dead, and his business sold; but Easterhaven is a rich and progressive city, as well as a prosperous one, and there soon appeared to be an embarrassing variety of partnerships and investments among which to choose. In the meantime, as nothing was fixed upon, and as the house term of Whitsuntide was close at hand, it was decided that he and his family should remain at Netherbyres.

Kenneth Ford was convinced that his grandson would turn out a wonder—if brought up on oatmeal porridge.

'We will hae nane o' the new-fangled English ways wi' Kenny,' he used to say, as he sat with his tasselled cap subject to the grasp of this five months old tyrant. 'Odds! mem, I mind when there was not one Carron grate, and not ten silver watches, or ten teakettles in the hail parish; but plenty of parritch-bowls, and luggies, and horn spoons for supping the kail wi'.'

Annie Ford was a pretty and amiable young

woman, and she gained the farmer's favour by assenting to all his theories, which she did not quite understand, while she wisely reserved the practice for future consideration. 'She is real wiselike,' Kenneth Ford would say. 'I was feared she would be unco' nash and delicate-like in her ways, but she's like the wifie in Allan Ramsay's sang, "she gaes as fait as a new preen," and is not one of that weary women that take as muckle care o' themselves as if they were somebody else.'

Out of respect to her, and for the love of little Kenneth, the farmer had actually consented to have the rooms in the upper part of the house put in order for her. Hugh was full of plans, and only Alaistair's illness had put a stop to his inspection of the premises, for it was, indeed, a question how far the joists and beams of the old floors would stand his proposed alterations.

On the day after the funeral Annie Ford asked Marion if she did not mean to go down to the Manse, and pay Miss Esslemont the visit which the minister had told them his sister would then be happy to receive. Marion hesitated. Her thoughts, all her

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reason, she felt as if it would be impossible to put herself in Mr. Esslemont's way. The next move must come from him. Perhaps when it came it would help her to understand how matters stood between them. 'I think it would be better to wait till tomorrow,' she said at last; 'the poor thing slept very little last night, I dare say. Had we not better leave her quiet for another day?' she pleaded; and then nothing more was said on the subject.

But that very afternoon, and at the hour when Annie and Marion had originally intended walking down to see Miss Esslemont, a thing happened which took Marion, at least, very much by surprise—Mr. Archibald Fyfe, widower, and distiller, and master of the great distillery which fills all the glen below the Chapel Heugh with its red roof and tall chimney, made her an offer of his hand.

He was the richest man in the parish, and the ugliest. When Hugh and Marion were young and pert, they used to say that the roof of his head and that of his distillery matched each other, and Mr. Fyfe certainly had the biggest head, and the most

fiery crop of hair, that ever a Scotchman was afflicted He was altogether of a coarse type. He had a broad, flat nose, very pale eyes, ill set in a florid countenance; he walked with a heavy step, ate largely, and was jocose over his toddy; but he was wealthy, practical, and not ill-tempered. About six months before he had come to the conclusion that he had mourned long enough for his first wife, and not only, like the Laird of Cockpen, did he now want somebody to sit at 'his table-head,' but he required some one to bring up his two little girls of three and four years old. He had first proposed to a Miss MacMurdo, in Perth, and had been rejected, and now his heart was caught in the rebound. Marion was to become Mrs. Fyfe, and for the following reasons. First, that, having been refused by Miss MacMurdo, he owed it to himself to be accepted this time, which he reckoned on being, as Marion was his inferior in the social scale; whereas Miss MacMurdo, as a General's daughter, had scorned both him and his distillery. Secondly, the return of Hugh, and the strange episode of Captain Mackenzie's death, had brought the family at Netherbyres, as it were, into fashion, and Mr. Fyfe for that

reason, had called there latterly once or twice; had heard the old farmer's tale of his son's adventures and good fortune, and had taken a cheerful glass with Kenneth Ford, when that worthy suggested that 'a dry tale wants wetting.' Thirdly, Mr. Fyfe had in these visits remarked, as young Mrs. Ford did, that Marion was very pretty. In fact, she had charmed him the last time that he saw her, for she was walking up and down among the apple-blossoms, with the child in her arms. A shawl thrown over her shoulders enveloped both her and her little nephew, and as she walked she sang to him:—

'Dinna ask me gin I loe ye?
Deed I darna' tell.
Dinna ask me gin I loe ye?
Ask it o' yersell.
Oh! dinna look so aft at me,
For, oh! ye weel might trow,
That when ye look sae sair at me
I darna' look at you.'

Fourthly, Marion, happening to be in love with some one else, was, with her timid grace and gaiety, more attractive to men than she had ever seemed before, and the rich widower determined to make her his wife.

He set about the step in the most matter-of-fact way; and never was offer more unexpected made to a maiden more unwilling. He had made no preliminary efforts to please her, or to interest her in his children. Neither was he now a bashful suitor. No sensitive tenderness bewildered him, as when the true lover, at once proud and humble, shrinks, trembles, and hesitates long before venturing to incur a frown. Such a man will even mistake his lady's shyness, misread the pallor of her nervousness, and flee before a shadow on her face—one which, after all, is but a reflex of his own backwardness, or fears.

But Mr. Fyfe had none of these troubles. He arrived on a Saturday afternoon, about 3 P.M. He drove up to the door in a brand-new waggonette, rang the door-bell, and asked for Miss Ford. He took off his hat, and he wiped his head, till his red hair stood up in a prodigious way about his temples. He sat down, and he said it was 'very warm,' and then, after twirling his thumbs in every way for about ten minutes, he explained his errand. And Marion could not get rid of him. After she thought that she had made it plain to his understanding that she had no

intentions of becoming Mrs. Fyfe, he still seemed to consider that he had only to ask for a thing to get it, and he sat there, mopping his big, red face, till Marion, out of all patience, could have cried with vexation.

At last, to her no small relief, Hugh sauntered into the room, and put an end to a conversation of which he soon guessed the import from his sister's face, if not from the manner of her visitor. Mr. Fyfe, to do him justice, was calm; but as there was no chance of Hugh suggesting, as old Mr. Ford would have done, that this was 'a dreigh business,' and as such needed wetting, he departed. When he had shut the door upon himself Hugh said:

- 'Upon my word, I had no idea this was going on, though I have seen him here once or twice.'
 - 'Going on! What do you mean?'
 - 'I had no idea Mr. Fyfe was after you.'
 - 'Nor I, I am sure.'
- 'It will be a first-rate thing for you, and put everything on the square again. I say, May, you will be the richest woman in the country-side.'
 - 'By making spirits too! You know how fond of

that work I am sure to be after what has just happened in this house.'

'Nonsense; people can't all drink water, and what is more, they won't. So if he asks you to marry him I hope you will take him.'

'But he has asked me to marry him, and I can't get him to believe that I won't take him.'

'Why in the world don't you marry him? You are not in love with anyone else, are you?'

Marion, with the charming disingenuousness of her sex, said 'No,' and then walked to the window to hide, not only a blush, but a tear of something very like vexation. The addresses of Mr. Fyfe had jarred upon the girl. They brought into contrast the coarse dullness of the one nature with the tenderness, the self-abnegation, and the sweetness of the other: the total want of tact in the distiller, and the sympathy for her lightest word or wish that she found in Mr. Esslemont.

The humblest woman wishes to be won, and not to be carried off as the captive of a savage triumph—and so Mr. Fyfe's suit offended Marion. Even had her heart not been preoccupied, the over-confident

distiller would have had no chance. Her nature was little, too little, affected by objective realities. She cared a great deal for her own self-respect, and not at all for conquests, and Mr. Fyfe's fortune tempted her just as little as his proposal flattered her. She was practical in matters of duty, but, for her own account, occupied herself rather with such unpractical abstractions as goodness and honour. A blunt request, therefore, to convert herself, without further preamble, into Mrs. Fyfe, seemed to give her a moral and physical shock.

Hugh, the dreamy boy of former days, could not now understand her. It was he who was practical enough to set before her the advantages of a rich marriage.

'No, no,' she replied. 'And what a way of setting about it he had!'

'Girls are so silly,' retorted Hugh, as if his own experiences at Netherbyres had all been discreetest and best.

Marion coloured. 'Don't let us say anything more about it. Above all don't tell my father. I will not keep Mr. Fyfe's "braw house;" and I don't want

the carriage that he says he has just set up. I have gone on foot all my life, except when father was able to keep his own gig: and I had rather go barefoot alone than shod with Mr. Fyfe.'

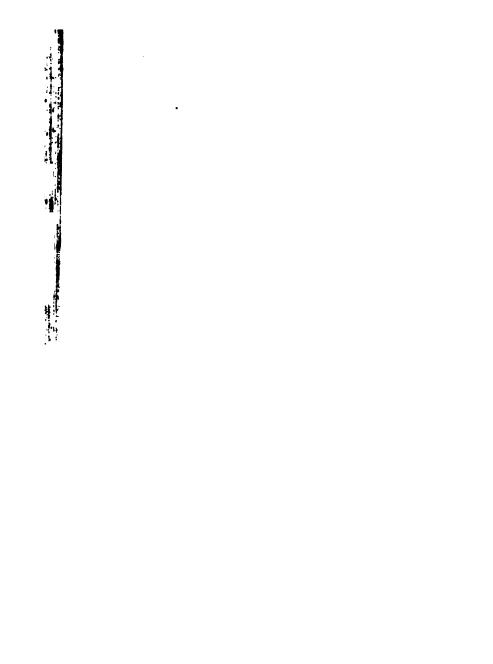
'You will be sorry for it.'

'Not a bit of it, Hughie. What I am sorry for are the two little girls—but I will be bound Mr. Fyfe will get them a stepmother before long.'

'I am glad no one hears you but me, Marion, for I don't know the fellow that would not have his bristles put up by the way you are talking. What can a man do more than ask a woman? And what would you have?'

Marion knew very well what she would have had; but after saying that she hoped Hugh would not mention the thing to their father she left the room.

She was soon to have good cause to regret both Mr. Fyfe's visit and Hugh's knowledge of its object.



CHAPTER XV.

ALARMED.

'Return thee hamewarts, hairt agane,
And byde quhair thou was wont to be;
Thou art ane fule to suffer pane
For luve o' her that luves not thee.'

Quod ALEXANDER SCOTT, 1567.

CHAPTER XV.

THERE is always a bird of the air to carry the matter, and the bird on this occasion was Hugh Ford. He naturally told his wife all about Mr. Fyfe, which did neither good nor harm, as far as it went; but he also imparted it to old Mrs. Miller, to whom gossip was dear. Mrs. Miller tasted this piece with all her mind. During her son's attendance on Alaistair Mackenzie she had been convinced that he was also paying attentions to Marion Ford; and as she lived in terror of Walter presenting her with a poor and insignificant daughter-in-law, she immediately sided with the distiller.

'Set her up!' she cried. 'Not have Archie Fyfe! Set her up! My word, somebody has been blowing in her lug, or else she is sair left to herself. But she will be sorry for it yet. It is not every girl

that has such a prospect before her, and those that cut off their nose to spite their own face are sure to find their mouth full of blood.'

'Perhaps it is not too late yet,' suggested Hugh.
'Money is very scarce at Netherbyres, and this is a first-rate offer.'

'I'm willing to try; but it will be a slimmer affair. Men are curious creatures: they are curious creatures! Some are off at the first word of a slight, let alone a denial; and some think all the more of a lass for putting herself on a high shelf. It is true that "nineteen nay-says are half a grant," as the proverb tells; and a man that is genty and canty just gives a woman time to come round. I am afraid that Archie Fyfe has a fine bit of a temper though. His first wife, poor Jessie Laing, found that. But it can do no harm to give them both another chance of meeting. If the Doctor is agreeable I will just ask them all to tea. You will bring your wife, Hugh, and there's Walter at home. I can but try.'

Mrs. Miller meant well; but while she was arranging for a tea-party, while 'cookies' and biscuits

were being baked, and the silver of the old Doctor's table was being cleaned in anticipation of the event, the old lady forgot that the soul of diplomacy is silence, and she spread far and wide the news both of Mr. Fyfe's intentions and of her own well-meant negotiations.

The state of the drugget in her dining-room obliged her to go to Easterhaven, and to refer to the taste of some of her female friends there. To them she declared, under seal of secrecy, that, dear as this new drugget was, she should not grudge it if Archie Fyfe got his way, and Marion Ford was settled. 'That business with Dr. Fairlie went much against her, you see; and this is just an opportunity of which she will not see the like again.'

The female friends applauded this sentiment, though they agreed, as soon as her back was turned, that Mrs. Miller had been *done*, both about the drugget and the ham that she had bought. They only hoped she would succeed, and in fact they must have been so sure of her triumph, both over the maiden reluctancy of Marion, and over the wounded feelings of Mr. Fyfe, that they told all their female

friends that Miss Ford was engaged to be married to the distiller of Lumgair.

It was in this full-blown shape that the report, after having been handed about in the circles of the busy city, returned to the Kirkton, and finally reached the ears of Mr. Esslemont.

He heard it on Sunday afternoon, when, after worship, he walked across the village street with his elder, Mr. Moodie, the poor-inspector and session clerk.

'It would, nae doot, be Airchie Fyfe that you had in your eye this morning, when you were upon the mârriage in Câna o' Gâlilee? You gave us a perfect epithalâwmium,' added Mr. Moodie, who, being the schoolmaster as well as the poor-inspector, was glad to use a word in six syllables.

'No. What about Mr. Fyfe? Is he going to be married?'

'He is to be married upon Miss Ford, as I heard in Easterhaven yesterday.'

Mr. Esslemont said 'Very likely,' and then disappeared into the Manse.

No! he had not been thinking of Mr. Fyfe that

morning, nor was it for him that that sermon had been intended. It had been a new song out of the love and hope of his own deep heart.

He had spoken of the Saviour's gracious presence at the wedding-feast, and of the miracle by which water had been by Him turned into wine: the common, beggarly elements of life undergoing this change when perfect, wedded troth is brought to bear on them, when Love takes the command, and Self disappears in the glad union of two lives.

He dwelt on the periods of want, and solitude, and emptiness; of the patient waiting of the heart; of the stone waterpots that stand full to the brim, and have stood so for long, till we are almost tired of hoping for any alteration of their tasteless contents into something 'rare and strange,' till, by a miracle of mercy, at last from those joyless sources the wine of gladness flows.

'Surely,' he went on to say, 'our life is not just a poor, daily struggle. It is, if we will have patience, the dawn of an unutterable joy. What is the larger hope of the world but for our ultimate escape from the formless uncertainty of these twilight lives into the Divine Presence, where, at the Supper of the Lamb, our hands shall not shake, nor the cup of the new wine spill? For this we long and wait; looking for the coming of a King who shall reign in righteousness. But till He comes, men have still to sit before the waterpots of the Jews. Definitions, and dogmas, and doubts, and darknesses, yea, even despairs, are the portion of the eager and of the expectant. But the vision is yet for an appointed time: though it tarry, wait for it. God comes, and at His coming the water will be turned into wine, and the foolishness of human guessing into the wisdom of Divine knowledge. Then shall we say unto Him who loved us, and bought us, 'Verily thou hast kept this good wine to the last."

In these words Mr. Esslemont had preached that day. In his church there had been some who wondered, and some who slept, some who thought that his sermon was the epithalamium of his richest parishoner, and one to whom his words were pleasanter than 'noise of trees, or hidden rill.'

That had been only a few hours ago. Alas! the day! and, alas! where was its happiness gone? Alas!

for this sweet spring Sunday; and, alas! for the sweet face, so lost to truth and honour, for if thisnews was true Marion was indeed forsworn. had she not in the last weeks seemed to turn to him, and to trust him? It was true that when he had first spoken to her unmistakable words of wooing, her face had first lightened for a moment, and had then worn a look of pain, which had both puzzled and frightened him. Still she had seemed to suffer and to sympathise with him. Can a sort of wilful credulity in one's own fancy so far mislead a middle-aged man? Could it be all a mistake? Was the wish father to the thought, to such an extent as to have altogether deceived him? But then, on the other hand, has love, a love like his, no instinct, that it should so far mistake love's signs? Could glances at once so shy and so trustful mean nothing? And why did Marion often begin sentences to others and finish them to him; and why did the lids, on his appearance, always fall so fast over eyes that saw, though they often would not look?

Marion was changed: of that there was no doubt; changed in manner, changed even in face, for her

pallor was more marked than usual, her head drooped with a new thoughtfulness, and she had a new charm of timid gaiety.

These things were not imaginary; but then had he been wrong as to their cause? Could it all mean that, while she knew herself to be admired. she was quietly about to marry Archie Fyfe?

Impossible! Why, he was a man of forty, who looked fifty; had a figure like a bolster, a mouth like a post-office, and a head like a red ox. Could Marion Ford mean to give herself to him? If she did, it could only be for the sake of his wealth—for a carriage, and a fine house, for watches, and for rings! It was a vile notion; and when Mr. Esslemont thought of Marion in her plain dark dress, with her little, unringed hands, and her little, unpierced ears; when he remembered her unselfishness, her simple tastes, her good sense, and her powers of endurance, he was ashamed even to suspect her of selling herself, or to think of her for a moment as either greedy or vain.

That she should have loved Robert Fairlie had been natural, excusable, probable, certain; anything,

in short, that you like to say of it, for Dr. Fairlie was young and good-looking; and men and maidens are so made that they are not likely to meet every day with impunity. All that, though he had suffered from it, he had understood, but this was incomprehensible.

Some pressure must have been put on Marion if it were true. At all events, he would apply to Hugh, and ask him if Mr. Fyse was, or was not, a suitor for his sister's hand, and, above all, how long such a project had been discussed among them? As the joy of serving her during one hour had transfigured the whole world for him this spring, so the hideous insecurity of human life now seemed to paralyse him. What, if his Marion failed him, should he ever dare to think of as being God-given? And what, if this had been all a dream, was to become of the inspiration of moral health that had seemed to come to him through her? With her would perish the power of joy, of possessing, or even of rightly understanding all beauty of the outside world. He must distrust all fair things, if she, with her fair seeming, was only as others, reckless and greedy, vain, cunning, and base.

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CHAPTER XVI.

AT CROSS PURPOSES.

'Child, if it were thine error or thy crime,
I care no longer, being all unblest;
Wed whom thou wilt, for I am sick of Time,
And I desire to rest.
Pass on, weak heart, and leave me where I lie;
Go by, go by.'

TENNYSON.

CHAPTER XVI.

WITH a companion as communicative and as facile as Hugh, Mr. Esslemont was not obliged to beat about the bush, or to put any leading questions. Hugh sauntered into the Manse, as it happened, early on Monday to talk about the alterations at Netherbyres, and to show the minister two letters which he had received from America. His business capacities were as small as ever, and he liked to have his decisions made for him, so as to save himself further correspondence. As he rose to go he said to the minister, 'You are going to tea with Mrs. Miller to-morrow, I suppose?'

- 'If nothing happens to prevent it.'
- 'I wonder how Archie Fyfe will look, and if they will make it up?'
 - ' Who is to make up what?'
 - 'Well, Archie Fyfe and my sister have been

sweethearting a little this spring. But they did not exactly understand each other the last day that he was at Netherbyres. I believe it was my fault, for I came in and spoilt sport. Mrs. Miller is going to have them both to tea, which is really friendly of her. Marion could not do better for herself than she is doing now, and I hear from Mrs. Miller her first affair with a young doctor here all ended in smoke. Let us hope this one will be all right. Fyfe is very rich, is he not?'

'Certainly,' was the reply. 'But now, Hughie, either you must go or I must, for I have to be at the Cunning Hill for a baptism at twelve.' And with these words the minister dismissed his visitor.

If in matters of great moment men and women could only keep their heads cool, how much sorrow and trouble they might be spared! If Mr. Esslemont could only have endured a second touch on the wound he might easily have led on Hugh to discuss this wooing of Mr. Fyfe's, and then Hugh would certainly have revealed Marion's distaste and vexation at his hasty suit. But the minister could not bear another touch, nor could he endure that Hugh should

see the agony which this one had sufficed to inflict. So he hastily dismissed the only person who might have enlightened him, and then, with his head in his hands, he sat there, angry and despairing. For twelve hours he had hoped against hope, and imagined every extenuation or excuse. Now Marion's fickleness was a fact. Anger kept him up, otherwise more than once during that day, through his solitary hours, as through those when he had to listen to Clementina's complaints and disjointed chat, he must have broken down. He felt as if his heart must break, as if he must curse this faithless girl, and die. Only he was the minister of the parish; he was old enough to be her father, and he must not go and make a fool of himself, or a show of himself. He must put in an appearance at Mrs. Miller's, as if nothing were the matter. And what was the matter? Only a girl had proved untrue. How many are! Only a man had proved himself a fond fool. How many have done the same—and what about it? Who cares? Down, down! die down, heart of love! die down, hope! peace, Enchantress! be silent, now and for evermore. Marion is fickle; Marion is false and

cunning; Marion is cold and greedy—Marion the maid. 'Marion, my Marion! you are bought and sold.'

The minister turned on his pillow; cries broke from the unquietness of his heart, but he rose, dryeyed and sleepless, determined to go to Mrs. Miller's, and to meet the lovers there.

At the bottom of his heart there was really an insane, far away, groundless hope that the pain of it all might kill him, or stun him; in which case it would be worth his while to have gone, and to have gone through with it all. Any way, he was to go.

Mrs. Miller worked hard that day. She scolded the village tailor because the new drugget was put down so far from straight, and Jessie, the maid, because her best lappets had got a stain, and because the best ashet was cracked. She scolded the Doctor because he was ready too soon, and Walter because he was ready too late; and then she sat herself down to wait for her guests.

The first comers were uninteresting people. One has noticed in life that *they* never by any chance fail to appear, and to appear in very good time. Then

¹ Large plate for a joint, from assiette.

came the Fords, three in number. Mrs. Miller began to be pleased, for young Mrs. Ford was pretty, and pleasing, and smart, in garments the like of which had never been seen in Lumgair before, and which would obviously furnish talk for a month.

Marion, with her soft smile, looked very well in the first silk dress she had ever possessed. It was her brother's gift to her, and Mrs. Miller was complimenting her on it when the minister entered. His ears caught the words and their bantering tone, and his jealous eye also caught the soft silky folds, and being thus occupied he did not see that on his appearance the little, quiet face changed in an odd way, though it would have been untrue to say that Marion had greeted his entrance with either a smile or a blush. He shook hands with her, as with the others, and then he sat down on the little sofa beside the old Doctor. There he was, or pretended to be, absorbed in parish talk; but the mistress of the house, growing anxious for the guest who was to play the first rôle to-night, watched the door anxiously for a quarter of an hour, and then began to cry at intervals, 'Preserve me, Dôctor! what can be keeping Airchie Fyfe?'

The minister talked on as if no such individual existed; and, while Walter Miller did his best to entertain pretty Mrs. Ford, Marion sat by the window. At last the door opened, and Mr. Esslemont glanced not at it, but across to where Marion was seated. Her eyes were on the ground. That was the only change he could see. Then she looked up, for Mrs. Miller, on receiving a letter from Jessie, the maid, cried out again, 'Preserve me! what ails Mr. Fyfe now?'

'There will be no Archie here the night, that is plain to see. What's wrong with him, wifie?'

'Did ever anybody hear the like of this!' And Mrs. Miller, opening the envelope, read the distiller's excuses. After struggling all the week with a heavy cold, he had gone this morning to Broughty Ferry, and had returned with such a severe oppression that he was said to have bronchitis, and must therefore give up joining Mrs. Miller's party. His regrets Mrs. Miller did not even take the trouble to read.

'I never knew Archie Fyfe wi' bronkeetis before,' said the Doctor. 'He's getting very full in the body, and should be more prudent, and take more sweeting

exercise. But, wifie, let us have our tea. I am very dry myself.'

To say how Mrs. Miller grieved over the failure of her plans, and of her party, would require a more eloquent pen than mine. Like John Gilpin's wife it might be said of her that 'though on pleasure she was bent she had a frugal mind,' and sorely she now grudged the new drugget, and the new ham, and the journey to Easterhaven, and the trouble, and the quantity of forethought which she had given to a thing destined to have only this lame and impotent conclusion. 'Let it be a warning to you,' she said to Marion in a loud aside; and the girl, seated between her brother and her hostess, and avoided by Mr. Esslemont, was left to reflect that neither abundance of cates. nor yet one's first silk dress, are able to ensure one a pleasant evening.

The Doctor alone enjoyed his ham, undisturbed either by love or by diplomacy.

Mr. Esslemont's heart smote him once as he caught Marion's eyes. Their glance had something in it of pain, which might, of course, be caused by the

non-appearance of her rich suitor; yet, though she was dressed with unusual care, he could not deny, nay rather he felt in every nerve, that there was a something about her so dedicated, so still, and he had almost said so holy, that it seemed a sin to blame her, or to couple her fair name with baseness. After having exchanged only one insignificant sentence with her, he left early, but at the door he contrived to have one more look at her. The little head was drooping, as she sat just where she had sat all evening, with a bundle of Indian photographs on her lap, letting Walter Miller teach her the difference between Hindoo temples and Mahomedan mosques. Yes! she was very pretty, and she looked well in that soft silk, with the ribbons at her throat, and the frills round her small wrists: very pretty; well fitted to be a rich man's wife, to drive in her own carriage, and to be spared for evermore all drudgery and denials. 'Wed whom you will, Marion, and as the world goes round let night follow day, but no day will ever bring to my hearth so sweet a face. Ah! tuneful voice! sound never more in my silent room. I have waited for the Lord that He should have mercy upon me, but He has not inclined His ear unto me, and I shall die alone, of the weariness of my vain desires, of my pitiful, unconquerable yearnings, and of this sickening famine, this thirst of my heart for you, my love! my love!'

Only after long torment in the furnace of his own heating did George Esslemont fall asleep. In his dreams Marion came to him. The sorrowful distrust born of her past pain no longer made her reserved and cold: smiling as she never smiled by day, red-mouthed and dewy-eyed, the dream-maiden came gliding, and, with her sweet breath, she woke him, as with a kiss.

The real Marion Ford in the meantime sat on the edge of her bed, and, with her hands clasped round her knees, saw the moonlight creep along the walls. Her fair hair curled about her shoulders: her eyes were tearless, but sad, and her breathing rapid. Again she had indulged in a daydream—lived in a fool's paradise. How silly of her! She remembered that once, when she was a little girl, she had put an acorn into a bettle of water, and had fully expected an oak tree to grow! The bottle remained, but of the

tree no twig had ever appeared from that day twelve years ago till now-till this day of disenchantment and pain. The sweet settled peace which she had been dreaming of was further off than ever, and Mr. Esslemont had nothing to tell her but what any friend of Clementina's might wish to learn, after seeing the death of Alaistair Mackenzie. Possibly he meant to show her a letter, of which Walter Miller had already spoken to her, and which revealed how much Alaistair had once owed to the devotion and charity of a soldier-servant-Alaistair, such as he had been, had been loved by his servant, and by Miss Esslemont: she, Marion, was unbeloved. 'It will come again,' she cried, as if she were speaking of the attack of some fierce animal that had already wounded her; 'it has come again; and how shall I bear it? I am not a child now to cry, but, ah! I had grown to love him. The treacherous have dealt treacherously with me, and so it will be to the end, and, like my poor Katie, I shall find Death before I find Love.'

CHAPTER XVII.

ENIGMATICAL.

'We are not happy, sweet! our state
Is strange, and full of doubt and fear
More need of words that ills abate—
Reserve or censure come not near
Our sacred friendship; lest there be
No solace left for thou and me.

Gentle and good and mild thou art,
Nor can I live if thou appear

Aught but thyself, or turn thine heart
Away from me, or stoop to wear
The mask of scorn, altho' it be
To hide the love thou feel'st for me.'

SHELLEY.

CHAPTER XVII.

EVERY man's heart is a problem, and every woman's heart is as a writing in cypher, unless she chooses to surrender its key; and thus it happens that their mutual relations often make up an enigma which it is extremely difficult for two lovers to read correctly.

There is, I must own, something despairing about this. Consider only that ever since 'the tale of Troy divine' was written, the tender passion has been described, that poets and playwrights have analysed it till one might suppose that no riddles and no surprises were left. So many maps have been made of the country of the heart that none of its labyrinthine paths, or pitfalls, ought now to be unmarked; and the diagnosis of the malady of Love ought by this time to be unmistakable, even by the merest tyro. But nevertheless the old story remains ever new: true love makes shipwreck upon

rocks that are in every chart, and the man who has just lived through this sorrowful experience 'breaks his heart in two.' Men and women continue to mislead and to misunderstand each other, as if they had never heard that the anger of love is a brief madness. They play at cross purposes; they say what they do not mean, and mean what they do not say. In short, pique, pride, prudence, passion, shyness, and infatuation continue to furnish a very fair number of scenes for the requisite number of acts in their tragedy, or comedy, of errors; and even the spectators are puzzled to guess upon what finale the curtain is to fall at last.

When this zone, or stage, of misconceptions is once reached matters seem to go from bad to worse, and so they must continue to do, so long as the victims persistently keep hold of the wrong end of the skein. Each pull serves but to make the knots tighter.

Now, had these remarks been addressed to Mr. Esslemont he would, no doubt, have concurred in them, and have found some instances by which to prove their truth. But none the less was he now tormented by jealous fears. Hugh's words about

Mr. Fyfe had first shaken his trust. Mrs. Miller's machinations were plain to see, and through all, and above all, the fact of the disparity of age between himself and Marion gnawed at his heart. He remembered the saying of old Sir Richard Maitland of Levington, that

'Men should take voyage at the larkis' sang, And nocht at even, when passit is the day.' 1

When he looked at Walter Miller he felt all the force of it; and so convinced was he of there being a snake in the grass, that, had it been in his power, he would have certainly left Lumgair for a time, and allowed events to arrange themselves between Marion and her suitors.

Marion in the meantime felt all the chill of his altered manner to her.

She was sitting rather sadly, with little Kenneth in her lap, when she saw Hugh approaching.

'I say, Marion,' he said by way of preface as he sat down beside her, 'it was very unlucky about Mr. Fyfe last night.' Marion was silent. 'But there is this to be said, I hope that you saw enough to cure

you of a silly fancy that Annie says you have now got in your head.'

'Annie says! What does Annie say?'

'That you have taken a fancy to the minister. Of course, when that poor chap was dying in our house he was here every day; it couldn't be helped: He could not help it; but I think you might have helped getting soft about him. He is fifty if he's a day: I will bet you anything you like he will never see fifty again, and he is not thinking of sweethearting. He is as poor as a mouse, and has that crazy sister to keep, and even if he were to ask you to-morrow, it would be the most stupid thing you could do. But he won't. You could see that for yourself last night. He never addressed you, that I saw.'

'Did you look?' asked Marion drily.

'I was not thinking about him. I, of course, knew nothing about it; but Annie told me when we got home, that she knew you were in love with Mr. Esslemont, and that she had watched him all night, and that he never spoke to you. Did he?'

^{&#}x27;I don't know.'

^{&#}x27;You don't know! It is too silly of you.'

'Hugh, I managed my own affairs before you came home, and if you leave me to do so now I shall be very glad.'

'Of course, you are in a passion because I tell you the truth. But I speak in your own interests. It would be a pity to get talked about twice, Marion. You had far better marry and settle, if you can't help falling in love—some girls can't; but it ought to come to an end; and here is a man who is a capital match ready to marry you—at least he was: of course I can't say how it may be now. If he, like Annie, has got hold of this ridiculous story about the minister, no wonder he would not meet you. I dare say that was why he said he had bronchitis. believe he had. The Doctor had not been to him. I'll go and ask for him to-day; and when he gets better do, for all our sakes, be reasonable. Don't fret yourself for nothing,' he added, in rather a less scolding tone, for he noticed that Marion's face was deadly pale. 'Will you come down to the Cove with me?' he asked, after a pause, by way of making peace with her; but Marion only shook her head, and he moved away.

Oh! why had Hughie ever come home?

Marion sat like a person who is stunned. Then she began to recall the events of the evening at Mrs. Miller's. As regards Mr. Esslemont they were few and simple. He had spoken to her once, about the weather, and little Kenneth, and she had answered, 'Is it not?' and once she had caught his eye. But as regarded herself what had she said or done that Annie Ford could have observed? Or had Annie heard the two sentences in the Manse garden when Mr. Esslemont had called her by her Christian name? She must have done so, for really during the party at Mrs. Miller's she was aware of having shown nothing but a weariness which the company could not attribute to any tender cause.

But how terrible that Hugh and Annie should have found out her weakness, her heartache, her mistake! Was she really so mad as to have let her happiness out of her own hands? And what did llugh know about Dr. Fairlie and the inglorious close of her first love, that he dared to allude to it, dvise her not to get herself twice talked of in rish? Really it was unbearable to have Hugh

scolding her. Two months ago he was almost forgotten in the place, and only owed his return to it to her affection. Now, between his encouraging Mr. Fyfe's preposterous suit, and worrying her about the best friend she had, home had become a place of torment to herself.

Many tears did Marion shed that night; for before dinner her father also scolded her for sending away Mr. Fyfe. Kenneth Ford was not violent, as he used to be, but some tears of weakness ran down his palsied cheeks, as he bade Marion be a good girl at last, and take a rich husband who could help them all, in foul weather as well as in fair.

If Hugh's scolding was hard to bear, how much more bitter was it to be urged to be a good daughter 'at last!' She had been a good daughter; had worked and slaved, and borne the burden and heat of the day, and this was her reward. Oh! what a weary, joyless, ungrateful world, and what a hard thing life is! It made Marion feel old, indefinitely old; older than Mr. Esslemont, whom Hugh kindly declared to be fifty; older than anybody she ever knew: as old as sorrow, or as old as Time, which weighed so

heavily, now that a new sister was vanity, and a restored brother a burden. And love? what was it? Ah! little would she have heeded all the rest had she had George Esslemont's love to fall back on. But he was only a kind, quiet old bachelor, and she was unbeloved, and a fool.

The only thing to be done now was to endure in silence, to wish Mr. Fyfe a long bronchitis, with twenty good ailments besides, and to prove for the future to Hugh and Annie, and indeed to all whom it might concern, that Mr. Esslemont was nothing to her.

CHAPTER XVIII. NEARLY LOST.

'Pained with her slighting Jamie's love,
Bell dropt a tear—Bell dropt a tear;
The gods descended from above,
Well pleased to hear—well pleased to hear.

When the fair mourner wailed her crime,
With flowing eyes—with flowing eyes,
Glad Jamie heard her all the time
With glad surprise—with glad surprise.
Some god had led him to the grove,
His mind unchanged—his mind unchanged
Flew to her arms, and cry'd, "My love!
I am revenged!—I am revenged!"

ALLAN RAMSAY.

CHAPTER XVIII.

An opportunity for doing this, unfortunately, was not long in presenting itself. For the following day it had been settled that Marion was to go with her sister and the child to Easterhaven; but, when the morning came, Hugh discovered some reason for preferring the city to the farmyard, and for accompanying his wife; so Marion was left to her reflections, and to the charge of her father.

Kenneth Ford was in his bedroom, and asleep. Marion's household tasks were over, and about 4 P.M., having laid on the table the shawl and hat she should need a little later, when she went to meet the party of pleasure-seekers at the station, she sat down to mend one of little Kenny's toys.

At work with a gluepot and a pair of scissors, she sat there with a smileless face. Between herself and Hugh another stormy interview could not be allowed

to take place. Her father's solicitations were more hard to refuse, and the girl cast in her mind the possibility of flying from Netherbyres for a respite at least. Still as she worked she arraigned herself at her own bar, and was obliged to confess herself guilty. What had grown up in herself for Mr. Esslemont, was a something very unlike her first girlish sentiment for Robert Fairlie. That had touched but had not subdued her as this did. This had begun with pity and admiration, and had only lately taken the shape of that vague unrest, part pleasure and part pain, which made her shed passions of causeless tears. Her sober, duteous, Scottish nature was now stirred to its very depths; and she was aware that to lose what she loved by death, or to die herself, would be less trying than have this torn out of her. Yet torn out it must be, and by her own hand: since by her own senseless hand it had been planted.

But, oh! the pity of it! The pity that this had been only a dream! only a dream, that more than anyone George Esslemont was ready to take care of her, as he was certainly more fit than anyone else to do so; only a dream that it might be in her power

to make that lonely and self-devoted life blossom like the rose!

But better anything than that Mr. Esslemont should guess her folly, as Hugh and Annie had already done. Perhaps he had! Perhaps that was why he sometimes looked at her with such grave concern, too true to say more than he felt, too considerate to say less—too kind even to say to himself what a nuisance, after all, a woman can be!

At this moment the door opened, and Mr. Esslemont stood before Marion, with a roll of papers in his hand. Her heart beat with a thick, muffled emotion, and a mist gathered before her eyes.

'I expected to find your brother here,' he said, hardly knowing whether to be sorry or not that an accident had brought him face to face with his 'dearest dread'—with the woman who occupied all his thoughts, even though she might be betrothed to another.

'No, Hugh changed his mind this morning,' was the laconic reply.

'How is your father?'

'Pretty much as usual.' And Marion neither invited her visitor to be seated, nor yet to go in, and sit with Mr. Ford.

One glance at her face had sufficed to show Mr. Esslemont that to-day something was far amiss. What had happened? he asked himself. He had half a mind to speak openly to her for once, to say such words as a man may say who has seen the end of a great hope, but who puts the one sweet day and its dream behind him, while he wishes her all sorts of prosperity. But was Marion happy in her newformed tie? This was not the air, or attitude, of a happy, affianced bride; and the face had got back that fixed, white look which it wore when he used to say of it that it looked like its own photograph. There was even a scornful ring in her voice when she addressed him. Yet what had he done? Could this be the Marion of ten days ago: with the sweet strength of her beauty and wisdom, with the perpetual comfort in her face? Those eyes with their warm brown now looked so grave; those curved lips, that never used to open, except to let you know the sweetness of her heart, and that mouth, so dumb to all

upbraiding, and so sealed for all complaint, how had they all changed! What had happened to her? Grant that she was going to marry Mr. Fyfe, why this sad face, so fixed, and set, and stern as that of a young judge?

He looked at her with the tenderest wonder, and then placed a chair for her; and, bending over the table, he began to explain his plan for the proposed alterations in Hugh's rooms and studio.

Marion gave a glance at the roll of drawings, and after a minute said coldly that, as she did not understand it, she thought it had better wait till Hugh's return, whose concern it was.

- 'These notes on the margin explain it, if you will look at them.'
 - 'I have, but I cannot read the handwriting.'
 - 'It is mine.'
- 'Is it?' replied Marion, whose disingenuousness was now complete, considering that she was at this very moment carrying about in her dress by day, and under her pillow by night, the half-sheet of paper in which, many weeks ago, Mr. Esslemont had made out the memorandum of her trains to Liverpool.

'I am afraid you are not well to-day,' he said at last, noticing that she put her hand up to her head.

She replied that she was, and that she was just going out. 'I am to be at the station to meet my brother and sister.'

This was an unlucky speech, for it reminded them both of that *tête-à-tête* walk to the station, when their hearts had so truly kept time with each other.

Marion as she said it unconsciously turned half-round, and flashed one passionate glance at Mr. Esslemont: and was met by one just as full of pain, anger, and reproach. Both recoiled from that look. Marion hastily seized her hat and shawl, and began to put them on; and Mr. Esslemont took a stiff and hurried leave of her, nearly as much puzzled as he was pained.

Hardly had he left than Marion threw off her hat and shawl and began to pace the room in the greatest agitation. What had she done? What must her friend think of her? She had no right to quarrel with him because she had made a fool of herself in her brother and sister's eyes. Mr. Esslemont had

looked surprised, and almost angry: and no wonder! Was this the way in which their old, tried, and sacred friendship was to end? Oh! bitterness! Ought she not as she went out to follow him, and to say something kind to him? But what? If she had been wrong, the less said about it now the better. If a man and a woman misunderstand each other, the woman at least must remain tongue-tied. No, rightly or wrongly done, Marion must abide by to-day's deed or misdeed. She had meant honourably—but—she had lost her friend!

'Oh! my friend! my friend!' she cried; and when in her rapid, agitated walk she reached the other end of the room she struck her forehead passionately against the wall, as if she hoped by the blow to numb her great mental pain. As she did so a sharp cry escaped her lips; but she still walked to and fro, striking her hands against each other, as she moaned out again and again, 'Oh! my friend!'

On turning round she found herself face to face with Mr. Esslemont. In passing under the window his ear had been caught by her cry. Knowing that she was alone in the house, he had been alarmed by it, had returned, had gently opened the door, and there he now stood, holding out both his hands to her.

'Marion!' he cried, pity, love, wonder, and remonstrance all mingling in his accents. 'Marion!' But the excited girl passed him, threw herself on a low seat before the table, and then buried her face in her shawl, which lay on it.

Mr. Esslemont knelt down on the floor beside her. She was sobbing with quick, deep sobs; but she did not now shrink away from him, but rather let herself be drawn nearer and nearer, till the mesmerism of his touch had stilled the passion of her sobbing. Then grave and low he breathed into the girl's ear his tale of love, deep, pure, patient, tender, and imploring.

Still Marion hid her face, and only brought out at intervals some broken words, possibly of tenderness or of self-reproach. But they might have been on any subject, or in any tongue—Mr. Esslemont heard them not: he only felt the wonder; and anyone else who could have looked on his face at that moment would

have seen it pale and radiant, and with dilated eyes. What was this miracle that had brought to his arms the prize that for four years had appeared to be beyond his grasp; the love that only to-day had seemed more lost to him than ever?

'Marion!' he said again, and the girl just moved her head a little nearer until it touched his arm. Thus emboldened he lifted up the face. It was no longer pale, but glowing with its noble, beautiful shame; and then the lovers looked into each other's eyes, and Marion laid her hand in his. •

CHAPTER XIX.

AT LAST.

'Alas! I have grieved so I am hard to love;
Yet love me—wilt thou? Open thine heart wide,
And fold within the wet wings of thy dove.'

E. B. BROWNING.

CHAPTER XIX.

'MARION, my dearest. I have loved you for so long—can you not guess for how long?'

The girl's eyes said, 'Tell me,' and he said, 'Since the day, four years ago, when you and Hughie came into my study about his picture. Since that day, and on that day, and through all the days.'

'Ah!' And a long shuddering sigh showed how deeply Marion was moved. 'Through all *those* days?' she said at length. 'But I was always dull, often perverse, and often wretched.'

'Is there anything you have ever said or done, for which I have to blame you, or for which I did not and do not love you?' And having said so Mr. Esslemont kissed the rings of her clustering hair. 'But I despaired of winning you. I had so little to offer to you, and I would have died sooner than harm

you, or offend you by asking for what to me had become the all in all.'

'Take it!' cried Marion, flushing; 'take it; use it; take all I am, or have, or can be. If only it were good enough for you!' And as she said so she bowed her head over her earnestly-clasped hands. There is certainly no humility like that of a very upright nature, and no frankness like the frankness of a very pure one.

Mr. Esslemont contemplated her with a rapt wonder. Though the city had held out long he was truly its master now. 'Marion, it is too intoxicating to hear you speak, to have you beside me, to see you yield thus to me. Child!' he cried, hastily withdrawing a hand on which Marion had tried to put her lips, and clasping her in his arms, 'child! I have so hungered and thirsted for you! I have so waited, and watched, and prayed, and hoped, and despaired for you!'

'I wonder that you were not tired of me. It all seems too strange; for I—I, in those days, wondered if it would not have been better that I had never been born, or at least that it should have been the Lord's will to take me when dear mother died.

She loved me; but I thought that she would be the last.'

'Ah, you have suffered so, dearest, and when I could not help you.' And as he spoke, and while his hand kept smoothing back the hair from her brow, he looked into her deep eyes.

'Never mind about it now. It must have made me hard to love: for that you must forgive me; but I meant honourably—I felt truly for you all the time. And when I saw, during the week that Captain Mackenzie was in the house, what your life was like, I forgot all my old pain. I felt I should like to be your servant or even your dog, to touch your life, and to help it. You were better than all the world, and yet had nothing of your own in it. It made me think what all the years in Lumgair had been to you. Was it wrong to care so much? At any rate, Hugh, who saw it, said that it was—and dishonouring, as you were not even thinking of me.'

'Clever Hugh! how well he has understood the last four years! The ice has frozen his wits.'

'Then I got into such a maze of troubles with all his talking to me! No one will ever know all the weary thoughts I have had; and the thing had become a bit of me, and so I could no longer help myself.'

'Have you ever been so good as to think of me?'

'When I stood beside Hugh on the landing-stage at Liverpool; when I sat up and watched beside your sister for two nights, in the Manse; when I knelt near her by Captain Mackenzie's deathbed, I thought of you. Was it wrong? Hughie said that it was a shame to me; and as I had—had—had had so much shame and pain already—that made me tum quite hard. Forgive me.'

'Bless you!' he answered hastily; and as he did so, he took the two small hands in his own, and kissed them. 'And I too have had my dark hours. When Hugh told me you were going to marry Mr. Fyfe I did my possible to keep away from you. If I could have left Lumgair, I would have done so five days ago.'

'And left me to marry Mr. Fyfe!' And, in her overwrought state of tension, Marion laughed at this notion till she cried. 'Why, Hughie ought to have been ashamed to say such a thing, even in joke. He and I made game of that man when I was six years old; so how could he think I would marry him?

And for you to think so was hard on me. Except in caring for you I have done nothing wrong, and I meant faithfully all the time.'

'But why do you speak of it as wrong to wish what I wished? to grant me at last my heart's desire, to give a snowdrop to my wintry existence, ivy to this old, brown tree?'

'I am so glad.'

'But, Marion, that is just what has shamed me so often out of asking for your love. I am far too old for you. I am nearly old enough to be your father. I suppose you know that?' he asked apologetically.

Marion laid her cheek with its soft, young curves against his arm, ere she replied, 'Am I to be pitied if I get father and mother, and brother and husband all in one?'

Hers was an unconscious paraphrase of the most tender apostrophe in the poetry of the ancient world, and its simple, pathetic candour brought the tears into Mr. Esslemont's eyes, while Marion added, in a lower tone, 'I should like to be happy, if it were only for a week.'

'There is another thing I have to tell you,' he

resumed: 'I am a poor man, and, owing to the charge of my poor sister, I must be called a *very* poor man. I hardly dare to ask you to become the mistress of that melancholy, little Manse.'

Marion glanced quickly at him. 'I love it,' she said; 'and if you had been rich, and had begun to try to tempt me with houses or gifts, you would have made but poor speed with me. I should have run away from your first word. I care not for any of these things. I care only——' The rest of the sentence she left Mr. Esslemont to guess.

'It is not only that the house is shabby and poor, but I do not blind myself to an affliction that shuts off my poor sister—that, I fear, indeed must shut us both off from any close human ties; from anything, my Marion, but a most unselfish love.'

'But your sister will get accustomed to me, and I hope she will come to like me.'

'But that does not prove that she will not make you suffer. I dread the trial for you. Even by those whom she loves my poor wandered sister is not always easy to guide.'

'God, and my love, will teach me what to do.'

'I know you will be ever patient, but it is the monotony of this sorrow that I fear for you. It is not a good life for a young woman.'

Marion shook her head.

'I know all the power of it. I have never complained, I do not complain, please God I never will complain; but I know what it has cost me. I do not wish it to weigh you down. It has pressed on me so sorely that at times I have rebelled, and had to pray for the pardon of my selfishness.'

'Selfish! Never!' cried Marion as she laid her hand on his. 'Never! Besides, what was too heavy for one will be light for two.'

'But am I right in letting you take such a charge?'

'What you have borne I can bear; that is, if you will let me. Let me help a life that for so long has had neither father nor mother, nor brother, nor——'Marion ceased abruptly; and Mr. Esslemont, feeling a shiver run over her frame, looked in her eyes and saw that she was weeping.

'What is it, my dearest?'

'Ah! do not ask me,' she replied; and he did not **VOL. II.**

ask her, but only kissed off her moist and tremulous eyelids the tears of her exquisite pity.

'For as long as God preserves my life, may He grant you never to shed any tears but those which pity wrings from your eyes!'

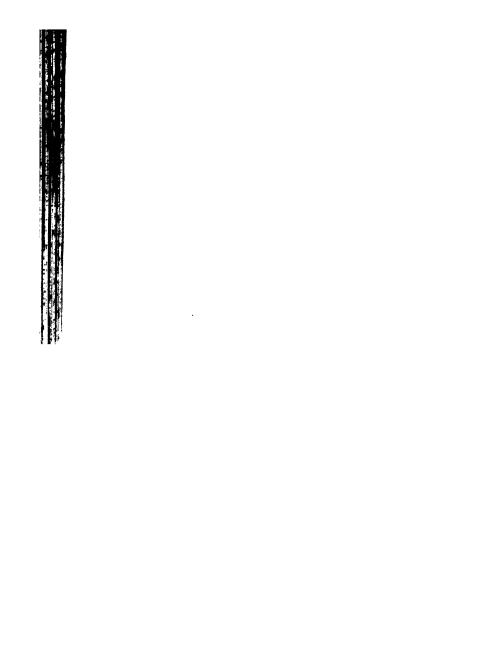
'I feel sure that I shall never have to shed any others. Ah! there is Hugh's step on the gravel!' And Marion, drawing herself from her lover's hold, fled away with the shyness and swiftness of a lapwing.

Upstairs and alone Marion asked herself what had become of all her trouble. All the passion of repressed feeling, all the dull misery of ungratified hopes, all the salt tears, the fever, and the maze of doubts and perplexities upon which she had only this morning opened her eyes, had vanished.

Thanks to one tender word, and to one glimpse into that patient heart, the bewilderment of the past days had turned to joy.

'Auburn Katie,' in dying, had said that there where she was going, she meant to ask the Lord for Marion's happiness. It had come! It was a miracle, it was mercy, it was bliss.

Then the girl knelt to thank God: as well she might. If sometimes, and for a season, 'clouds and darkness' are round about His footstool, none the less do mercy and truth go before His face; and to-day a loving, helpless, and wellnigh hopeless creature had cried unto Him, and seen that He is good.



CHAPTER XX.

L'ENVOI.

'For still we hope, That in a world of larger scope, What here is faithfully begun Will be completed, not undone.

'My child, we still must think, when we That ampler life together see, Some true results will yet appear Of what we were together here.'

A. H. CLOUGH.

CHAPTER XX.

GEORGE and Marion Esslemont are married lovers; and of their friends what more remains to be told?

But little.

It sometimes happens that at the end of a story there is a great deal of poetical justice to be dispensed, but in this homely little drama that is not the case. There is no one who deserves to be punished, and nothing left that requires to be explained.

Some of the weary are already at rest: a silent company, who will sleep in their narrow beds till 'from the east the eternal morning dawns.'

Miss Esslemont will continue to lead her passive invalid life for a few more months, and then pass away, to forget the confusions of her wasted life. Meantime three generations dwell peacefully under the grey roof of the farm at Netherbyres; and already

where men go to their labours, high in the furrows the corn of harvest waves.

Up and down the village street the happy children play, and weekly in the village kirk the elders gather to worship Him whose Truth is goodness and justice, and who would have all our goodness realised Truth.

Only in the Fisherton the wind and waves keep up the element of unrest; and though the fishermen may lounge to-night between the rows of the brown boats that they have beached among the shingle and all the waste and refuse of the shore, yet to-morrow they must again breast the waves, and toss among the white, flying foam.

How loud the Sound of the Sea is to-night!

Up here, where, under the ruin on St. Mary's Heugh, George and Marion Esslemont walk hand in hand, it comes with a deep, heavy boom.

By this the dim darkness of one of those summer nights, which is as the ghost of the summer's day, the Minister of Lumgair can see his wife's face, and he can see that it wears its happiest, sweetest look. The rapture and the wonder of his new-found joy are still strong in the man's heart, but over that of the woman there broods an exquisite settled peace.

Their happiness seems to be all around them tonight—exquisite and impalpable, like the scent of those milk-white thorns that fill the ravine below the ruin.

They walk slowly on over the Craiglands, towards the edge of the great red cliffs. The tidal waves are at work below, rising and falling heavily, echoing in the hollow caves; and as they retire baffled from the face of the crags, they fling up their salt weeds and their salter spray.

But where George and Marion Esslemont stand the spray and the bitter weeds reach not.

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